

In the Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Greg Stafford takes up the familiar defense of subjects having to do with the use and pronunciation of the divine name, the identity of the biblical God Jah and of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as issues and questions having to do with salvation, God's sovereignty and mankind's "free will." This edition also contains discussions of several controversial issues, including questions related to abortion, a person's sexual orientation, and regarding uses of blood.

Most significantly, this book puts forth not only a defense of some the biblical teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, but it also further introduces the Christian Witnesses of Jah, Jehovah's Witnesses who reject human traditions when these can be shown to contradict what is based on the best available reasons. Thus, a call is made to all Jehovah's Witnesses, to all Christians, indeed, to "every breathing thing" to bear witness to and to praise the biblical God Jah, and to acknowledge what can be shown to be true for good reasons about Jesus of Nazareth.—Psalm 150:6; Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12; Acts 18:24-28; Galatians 1:10; Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

GREG STAFFORD is also the author of *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses* and of various articles and debates on biblical Christianity and the history and the beliefs of the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses. He is a Christian Witness of Jah, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who rejects traditions and beliefs that are not based on the best available evidence.

Religion

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Jehovah's Witnesses Defended

AN ANSWER
TO SCHOLARS
AND CRITICS

THIRD
EDITION

REVISED (Digital Version)

GREG
STAFFORD



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Murrieta, California

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“This is the third time I am coming to you. ‘At the mouth of two or three witnesses what is said will be validated.’—2 Corinthians 13:1.

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Introduction

To the Third Edition

(Revised and Digital Editions)

In 1998 I published the First Edition of this book while fellowshipping with Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Then in 2000 I published a Second Edition. Since then much has happened in terms of my association with the Watchtower Society and with its members. But even more has happened to me personally in ways which I did not expect. While this is not the place to discuss all that has brought me to this point, it is the place and the time for the publication of my third defense of the beliefs and teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, against claims and accusations made by scholars and critics.

For good, scientific and other reasons I believe that there is an eternal, intentionally intelligent "life" whom history identifies further as the God of Moses, and by name as (in English) "Jehovah" and "Jah" (see Chapter 1).¹ Also for good reasons (which are not comprehensively put forth in this book because of its focus on Jehovah's Witnesses and on the teachings of the Christian Witnesses of Jah [see Chapter 10]), I accept the Bible as an accurate presentation of part of God's history and dealings with humankind. All others who claim to be Jehovah's Witnesses believe basically the same thing, as it relates to the Bible being from God. But something is different about Jehovah's Witnesses today, something different from who we were in 1998, in 2000, or even until just the past few years.

¹ For further discussion concerning the origin of life and intentional intelligence, see my "Advanced 'Earth Conditions': Corrections to Miller's 1953 Hypothesis and Its Likely Indications," *Elihu Online Papers I* (July 4, 2010 [Revised January 10, 2011]); see also my articles, "The Origin of Life Is Life (or Something or Someone Already Alive)," *Watching the Ministry* (link: <http://elihubooks.blogspot.com>) for January 13, 2010; "The Intelligence in Life: Intent and 'Time,'" *Watching the Ministry* (February 8, 2010); "Intentional Intelligence in Non-Human Life: The Division of Human Language," *Watching the Ministry* (April 5, 2010).

Because I have come to learn more about several important teachings and requirements of the Watchtower Society, which I believe to be in serious and evident error, and since the Society refuses to discuss these concerns with me or even openly with active members of its congregations (compare Matthew 18:20; Revelation 2:2),² I no longer associate myself with it or with its organization.³

My spiritual interests are based on what I have good reasons to believe according to the best available evidence. That is, in fact, how I believe most of us try to evaluate what it is we will do or what we will believe. At times we may also use our experiences to support our beliefs, but absent complementing good reasons our experiences are *our* experiences, and thus not very usable as good reasons by *others*.

In fact, having beliefs based on good reasons is precisely what it means to have “faith” in a Christian sense, for this involves a trust or an “assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities not beheld” (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 11:1). If such “realities” are believed but “not beheld,” then there must be good reasons for the belief.⁴ The good reasons often depend on the quality of the “witness” or testimony a person receives from someone or from something else. Such a “witness” should not be tainted by men’s traditions, this so the testimony or “witness” can be evaluated based on good reasons *alone*, rather than clouded by what is *not* necessary to believe.—Hebrews 11:2-12:1.

² Related to this, see my more recent article, ““Put *Them* to the Test,”” *Watching the Ministry* (July 7, 2011).

³ See, for example, my answer to the question, “What is your position on the use of blood, and how will this be presented in Jehovah Witnesses Defended, Third Edition?” in “*Upon the Lampstand*” (February 20, 2007 [rev. May 3, 2008]), pages 1-7, available through Elihu Books (www.elihubooks.com). Near the end of this question and answer article, I have reproduced three letters which I sent to the Governing Body in 2007 (the governing authority for Jehovah’s Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society). These letters were sent on February 25, 2007, August 15, 2007, and December 2, 2007. The Watchtower Society has not responded directly to any of them. See also my more recent, related discussion in the online article, “The Watchtower’s Prohibition Against Non-Food Uses of Blood,” *Watching the Ministry* (January 20, 2010).

⁴ See also my more recent article, “*Pistis*,” *Watching the Ministry* (May 27, 2010).

As indicated earlier, this practice of faith based on the best available reasons is not how members of the Watchtower Society are taught to effectively proceed with the development of their faith. Therefore, while I will defend what I believe to be true where it is based on the best available evidence, I am not interested in defending Watchtowerism or the belief that one must promote and defend as true *all* of the unique teachings and interpretations put forth by the Watchtower Society.

Indeed, being a Jehovah's Witness has nothing to do with being a member of the Watchtower Society. It means that a person is a witness for what is true for good reasons concerning the biblical God Jehovah, apart from the traditions of men (Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12). Biblically, then, it is impossible to be a witness for Jehovah God if we follow men who teach traditions which can be shown for good reasons *not* to come from God or from the biblical books associated with him.—Compare Galatians 1:10-11; 1 John 4:1.

There are many Jehovah's Witnesses today who have come to point where we have had to reaffirm what it means for us to be a witness concerning our beliefs about God and about Jesus. I am one of them. But now is again the time for me to bring forth my faith, to present the good reasons which I believe support it, and then to defend it. Other than as it relates to issues of the past, this presentation has nothing to do with the Watchtower Society, for it is "not willing" to move forward with me or with other Jehovah's Witnesses apart from its traditions.—Compare Revelation 2:21.

Related to this, missing entirely from this edition is the chapter from the Second Edition discussing the Watchtower's many inaccurate and even demonstrably false interpretations of Bible prophecy and chronology, as I do not see that their interpretations and predictions have ever provided a genuine occasion in which to praise Jah. Indeed, according to the Bible, it is God who interprets matters for his servants (Genesis 40:8). Therefore, it is not possible for the Watchtower Society's many *failed* interpretations to have actually ever originated with Jehovah.—Deuteronomy 18:20-22.

I have also left out some discussions of texts related to the divinity of Jesus, as taught in the Bible. These discussions will be

reprinted elsewhere, starting with the Excursus from the Second Edition on what is known as “Granville Sharp’s rule.”⁵ Please see the Elihu Books web site (www.elihubooks.com) for more information about where sections and appendixes from the Second Edition will be reprinted, or otherwise made available. References to some of these items are also provided in several footnotes in this book.

This edition also contains an expanded discussion of issues related to the use of “Jehovah” by Jehovah’s Witnesses, as it relates to other forms of the divine name, and concerning the meaning of the divine name.⁶ Related to this, the discussion of Exodus 3:14, has been revised and moved from Chapter 5 from the Second Edition to the end of Chapter 1 in this edition. This is because Exodus 3:14 has more to do with the meaning of the divine name than it does with anything Jesus is recorded as having said in John 8:58, or elsewhere in the Bible.

This latter text (John 8:58) is now part of Chapter 3, “Jesus of Nazareth: The Christ from Heaven,” in which I again present a complete discussion of the use of *ego eimi* in the New Testament (NT), showing clearly that Jesus’ use of the same expression is primarily for the purpose of identifying himself as the “Messiah,” the “Son of Man,” or as the “Christ” from God.⁷ I have also added a new section on Philippians 2:5-9, and a discussion of the real versus the “ideal” views of Jesus’ preexistence. Further, Chapter 3 now also contains a historical review of some of the

⁵ The Second Edition (2000) Excursus on Sharp’s rule can be obtained from the Topical Index (link: http://www.elihubooks.com/content/topical_index.php) on the Elihu Books web site under “G,” “J,” and “S.” For further, more recent discussion of Sharp’s rule and related texts, see my “Another Exception to Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin: A Further Response to Dan Wallace (With an Appendix),” *Elihu Online Papers* 2 (July 26, 2010 [revised January 30, 2012]), and more recently, “The Letter of Jude: A New Translation According to the Text of P72,” *Elihu Online Papers* 5 (January 18, 2012), both available online through www.elihubooks.com.

⁶ For additional discussion of the divine name and related issues, see my more recent online article, “‘Christian’ Witnesses of Jah, Jaho(h)-ah God” (April 2, 2011), on the Elihu Books Blog *Watching the Ministry*.

⁷ See also my answer to the question, “Why do different editions of the *New World Translation* (NWT) contain different footnotes to its rendering of John 8:58?” in “*Upon the Lampstand*” (December 17, 2009), pages 1-15, available through Elihu Books (www.elihubooks.com); see also the related article, “New World Translation Footnotes to John 8:58,” *Watching the Ministry* (January 13, 2010).

early interpreters of John 8:58, which I believe will help better define the origin of part of the understanding of this text still held by some today.

Chapter 2 presents and defends the biblical identity of the “one God” of Christianity as “the Father,” the one whom the Jews of Jesus’ day ‘said was their God’ (John 8:54; 1 Corinthians 8:6). In Chapter 2 I also attempt to expose problems with claiming the Trinity is a biblical teaching, or consistent with what the Bible teaches. I also discuss several texts which are part of the ongoing dispute between Jehovah’s Witnesses and Trinitarians, including texts about the existence of “G-gods” other than Jah, including texts which discuss or pertain to the divine nature of angels. Questions related to ancient documents which some allege are consistent with Trinitarianism are also considered in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 brings together discussions about three important texts from John’s Gospel, texts which relate to the biblical identity of Jesus of Nazareth and to questions about the *New World Translation*. In addition to considering what it means to be “G-god,” the three primary texts considered in Chapter 4 are John 1:1, John 1:18, and John 20:28.

Chapter 5 presents my good reasons for identifying and accepting the prehuman Jesus of Nazareth as the first of Jah’s creations, even his “Firstborn” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6), and also as the “Wisdom” of Proverbs 8:22-31⁸ and as “the beginning of God’s creation,” according to the best translation of Revelation 3:14. In Chapter 6 I complete my defense of our beliefs concerning Jesus of Nazareth, begun largely in Chapter 3. In Chapter 6 the focus is on the nature of Jesus’ resurrection

⁸ For further, more recent discussion of Jesus as the preexistent figure “Wisdom,” see my article, “Jah Loves Her, Wisdom, His Son, the Word,” *Watching the Ministry* (October 18, 2010); see also my article, “Micah 5:1(2): Reliable Prophecy and Real Personal Preexistence,” *Watching the Ministry* (November 24, 2010). Also, John 1:1 and 1:18 both relate to issues involving Jesus’ preexistence. For John 1:18, in addition to the material and discussion provided in Chapter 4, see my recent article, “Bart D. Ehrman, Daniel B. Wallace, and the Syntax and Meaning of John 1:18,” *Watching the Ministry* (November 1, 2011).

body, and so also as it relates to his nature as a “life-giving spirit.”—1 Corinthians 15:45.⁹

Chapter 7 on “The Freedom of Jah and the Free Will of Mankind” is new to this edition. It addresses an array of important and related subjects and issues having to do with God’s sovereignty and with whether, according to the Bible, humans made in God’s image have “free will” (Genesis 1:27; 9:6). In this chapter I also present the beliefs and teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and I use the acronym “OASIS” to introduce and to explain how these are supported by the Bible. I also attempt to show by comparison that “Reformed” theology’s use of the acronym “TULIP” is incompatible overall with what the Bible teaches.

Completing Chapter 7’s presentation about Jah’s sovereignty and our free will is Chapter 8 on the subject of “Salvation.” The Bible teaches that Jah permits humans to decide various matters and that our choices come with consequences, namely, life or death (John 5:28-29). The gift of life is according to Jah’s purpose in connection with Jesus of Nazareth. This “life” or salvation from God through Jesus is further considered in Chapter 8, as are the beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses along with some of what has been published by Watchtower Society. I also attempt to explain the difference between a faith without works, which is “dead” and “cannot save,” and a faith which is “perfected” by works and so alive and capable of saving a person in God’s judgment.—Compare Romans 2:6-10; James 2:14, 17, 22; Revelation 20:11-15.

In Chapter 9 I bring together several important social and other issues which have to do with the Bible, with some of the beliefs and practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and as they concern some of the teachings of the Watchtower Society. These include questions related to abortion, to sex and to sexual orientation, and to uses of blood prohibited by the Bible (see also page xiv, note 3). Finally, in Chapter 10 the Christian Witnesses of Jah are further identified in association with Jehovah’s Witnesses who

⁹ See also my more recent article, “‘A Spirit Does Not Have Flesh and Bones’: Another Application of Luke 24:39,” *Watching the Ministry* (February 23, 2011).

reject traditions of men (or women), where these can reasonably be shown *not* to be based on the best available evidence or, especially, where any traditions contradict the best available evidence.

As *Jehovah's* Witnesses, our intent is to bear witness to what we believe we can show is true for good reasons about Jehovah or Jah (see Chapter 1), about Jesus of Nazareth, and about the Bible and God's purpose for "mankind" (Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12; Micah 5:4-5; Revelation 21:1-5; 22:1-3).¹⁰ This book is, as its subtitle states, an answer to scholars and to critics of Jehovah's Witnesses. But it is also the product of my growth as an individual, and how during my growth I have come to see what it truly means to be one of *Jehovah's* Witnesses.

However, Jehovah's Witnesses remain in transition, as many are continuing to become increasingly concerned with the Watchtower Society's teachings, with the extent of authority it has claimed over the years, as well as with how it governs its congregations. Therefore, in addition to defending my faith as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, in this book I intend to show how other Jehovah's Witnesses can actively defend and present our faith and the good reasons for it, but apart from the traditions of the Watchtower Society or of anyone else, including me, when what we teach contradicts the best available evidence.

This does not mean I believe each Jehovah's Witness who continues bearing witness to Jah God and to Jesus apart from the Watchtower Society has to defend and present our beliefs in the same manner which I have done here in this book. Indeed, there are *many* things for Jehovah's Witnesses to do apart from the Watchtower Society, according to the "gifts" Jah will give to us through *faith in Jesus of Nazareth*, not faith in men (Romans 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 3:21-23; 12:4-28). For the "trembling at men is what lays a snare, but he that is trusting in Jehovah will be protected."—Proverbs 29:25.

¹⁰ See also my more recent article, "Three Things," *Watching the Ministry* (June 7, 2011).

Abbreviations

AB	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AD	<i>Anno Domini</i>
ASORMS	American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> (Eerdmans reprint series)
AJSLL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
B19	Leningrad Codex (11 th Century CE).
BAGD	W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich and F.W. Danker, <i>Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , Third Edition, 2000.
BAR	<i>Biblical Archeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of American School of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCE	Before Common Era
BDBG	Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius, <i>Hebrew-English Lexicon</i>
BHL	<i>Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BR	<i>Bible Review</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BT	<i>Bible Translator</i>
CE	Common Era
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
DJD	<i>Discoveries in the Judaean Desert</i>
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EOP	<i>Elihu Online Papers</i>
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpT	<i>Expository Times</i>
FL	<i>Foundations of Language</i>
FN	<i>Filologia Neotestamentaria</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBLMS	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>

<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KIT	Kingdom Interlinear Translation (1969 and 1985 Editions)
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint (unless otherwise indicated, Ralphs' <i>Septuaginta</i> , Stuttgart, 1979)
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	<i>New American Bible</i>
NASB	<i>New American Standard Version</i> (The Lockman Foundation, 1988)
NEB	New English Bible (Oxford, 1970)
NIDNTT	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
NIGTC	<i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i> (International Bible Society, 1984)
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	<i>Supplements to Novum Testamentum</i>
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> (Eerdmans reprint series)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NWT	<i>New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i> (Reference Edition, 1984)
OT	Old Testament
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i> (1989)
SBG	<i>Studies in Biblical Greek</i>
SBLSCS	<i>Society of Biblical Literature, Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series</i>
SBT	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology</i>
STDJ	<i>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</i>
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
UBS	United Bible Societies
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

VTSup	<i>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>



“Jehovah” and Jehovah’s Witnesses

Jehovah’s Witnesses are unique in their extensive public and private use of the name of the God of ancient Israel, which in modern English is pronounced, “Jehovah.” Jehovah’s Witnesses who are either associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society or with the Christian Witnesses of Jah have not only used this name in more than three hundred languages, but they also regularly use, discuss, and defend the significance of God’s name in their literature and in their world-wide ministry.¹ Truly, Jehovah’s Witnesses are *known* for their use of God’s name, more so than any other religious group active on earth today or over the past eighty years or so.²

While you may have heard that “Jehovah” is a modern English pronunciation of the biblical God’s name, unless you are one of Jehovah’s Witnesses or a Christian Witness of Jah you may have also been taught that it is not an “accurate” pronunciation. Indeed, given the fact that many popular English reference works have

¹ For more information regarding the languages in which Witnesses who are associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society publish literature containing God’s name, see <http://www.watchtower.org/languages.htm>. To learn more about the Christian Witnesses of Jah, see “Christian Witnesses of Jah,” *IN MEDIO* (October 1, 2007), and the more recent article, “‘Christian’ Witnesses of Jah, Jaho(h)-ah God,” *Watching the Ministry* (April 2, 2011), both available at <http://elihubooks.com>.

² For additional arguments in support of my claim here that the Witnesses are unique among all other religious groups on earth today in their use of the divine name, see my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002), pages 163-170. Though publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society used the name “Jehovah” before 1931, it was in that year that they began to call themselves “Jehovah’s witnesses” (then later, “Jehovah’s Witnesses”) whereas before 1931 they were known primarily as “Bible Students.” See “Equipping the New World Organization,” *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1950, page 211, par. 1.

suggested as much, some even going as far as to claim that the name “Yahweh” should be used rather than “Jehovah,”³ it would not be surprising at all to find that many people today are more reserved than they probably should be when it comes to the use of God’s name. I write “probably should be” because these same English reference works do not seem to have considered (and they certainly do not present) all of the relevant historical information on this subject, information that if fully considered would likely result in a much different conclusion regarding the pronunciation of the Judeo-Christian God’s name.

People throughout much of the past two thousand years or more have offered a variety of excuses for not using the name of the biblical God in their Bibles or in their public and private worship. Some people choose not to use the name without offering any good, biblical reasons for their non-use. They have simply accepted certain traditions that have no support from the Bible. But if there are no biblical reasons supporting non-use of the divine name, then the good, biblical reasons for using the name of Abraham’s, Isaac’s, Jacob’s, Moses’, and even Jesus’ God (Exodus 3:6-7; Micah 5:4) should be accepted. This is particularly true if those who do not use the name claim to worship this same God, for his name is found and used explicitly throughout the Bible.

In Chapter 1 of this book I am going to present the best available reasons for and against pronouncing the divine name today. I will also present and discuss a variety of other issues related to ancient and to modern pronunciations of the biblical God’s name, and in the process provide what I consider to be the best available evidence that I believe can help resolve any

³ The erroneous belief that “Yahweh” is to be preferred over “Jehovah” according to the Hebrew language (as if “Jehovah” is a Hebrew form of the name!) can be found in almost any English dictionary. For example, in *Webster’s II, New Riverside University Dictionary* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), page 651, we are told that “Jehovah” is an “Alteration of Heb. *Yahweh*,” and, “The form *Jehovah* did not exist as a Hebrew word.” But, again, no one claims that “Jehovah” is “a Hebrew word”! Rather, “Jehovah” is the Anglicized form of the Hebrew name of God which name is nowhere in Hebrew, Aramaic, or in any ancient Greek form of the divine name (see discussion below) clearly pronounced, “Yahweh.” For more on the use of Anglicized and transliterated names in English see note 4, and my article, “Why No Y in Forms of the Divine Name in English?” *Watching the Ministry* (June 3, 2012).

lingering concerns over the pronunciation and use of God’s name. In this light, I will explore the reasons given by some against use of God’s name in translations of the Old and New Testaments, in particular as it relates to the use of the name in the 1984 Reference Edition of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Finally, I will discuss the possible meaning(s) of the biblical God’s name and what this means for those who worship him.

It is my hope that in discussing these issues here and by providing a defense for the use and pronunciation of the divine name by Jehovah’s Witnesses based on the best available evidence, that there will be a greater overall appreciation for the use and for the meaning of the divine name in ancient and in modern times.

Pronouncing the Divine Name

Excuses for not using the divine name found in the Old Testament. There is no disputing that there is a distinct name for God found thousands of times in the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament (hereafter, OT). According to one popular, modern edition of the Hebrew Bible (the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* [BHS]), the four-letter form of the divine name (in printed or square script, יהוה) occurs 6,828 times.⁴ The name “Jah” (Hebrew: יה) also occurs as a stand-alone name 49 times in the same Hebrew text.⁵ So standing alone as a separate word the divine name as represented by both of these forms occurs a total of 6,877 times in the Hebrew OT. This is apart from any use of these forms of the divine name as a part of place or other personal names in the Bible (such as, “Jahaz” [Numbers 21:23] and “Jehohanan” [Ezra 10:6]).

What is in dispute is whether there are good reasons in the Bible itself for not using one or more forms of these names in modern translations of the Bible, or when speaking about the

⁴ This is the number of occurrences according to John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson, *The Hebrew English-Concordance to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), page 630.

⁵ Kohlenberger and Swanson, *The Hebrew English-Concordance to the Old Testament*, page 623.

biblical God. Also in dispute is whether certain popular forms of the divine name should be used, such as the Anglicized (English) form “Jehovah,” or what is claimed to be the most accurate pronunciation of God’s name in Hebrew, the transliteration “Yahweh.”⁶

I intend to show there is no good reason at all to avoid using modern, accurate equivalents to the divine name, just as there is no reason to avoid using modern pronunciations of any other ancient biblical name such as “Jesus” (see note 6). In this chapter I will provide good reasons for rejecting the belief that we do not have a reasonably accurate understanding of the pronunciation of the divine name. For good reasons I also believe a reasonable agreement can be reached today among most if not among all biblical scholars who study the divine name, that is, when it comes to the best form and pronunciation of the divine name to use in Bible translation and in teachings others about the biblical God.

⁶ A word is transliterated if its letters in one language are represented “in the corresponding characters of another alphabet” (*Webster’s II, New Riverside University Dictionary*, page 1227). For example, the name represented by the Greek letters Ἰησοῦς is “transliterated” into English as *Iesous*. This is not, however, the English form of the name, but the Greek form represented in the English “corresponding characters.” “Jesus” is the Modern English or Anglicized form of the Greek name which was first transliterated from Greek into the corresponding Latin form, *Iesus*. A word is “Anglicized” if it is made to “become English or similar to English in form, pronunciation, idiom or character” (*Webster’s II, New Riverside University Dictionary*, page 108). “Jesus” is not a name that any Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek speaking Jew or Christian in the first century CE would have known about or used. There is no “j” sound in any of these languages. Rather, “Jesus” is the form of the name of the New Testament Christ that has been made to “become English or similar to English.” Knowledge of Anglicization as explained above by *Webster’s II, New Riverside University Dictionary* is what makes its comments regarding “Jehovah” not existing as a “Hebrew word” (quoted in note 3) so surprising: Such comments put doubt on the name “Jehovah” but not on “Jesus when, in fact, one is also justified in saying “Jesus” is not a ‘Hebrew or a Greek word.’ Yet, today few hesitate to use “Jesus” in the Bible or when speaking to others. English does not regularly communicate using ancient names in transliterations. That is why, in part, there is often no Y character or sound in forms of the divine name, such as “Jah,” “Jaho(h)-ah,” or “Jehovah.” Otherwise we would have different rules for ancient names if we were to regularly use both “Yah” and “Jahaz.” Through Anglicization we make ancient names such as these into English or like English. However, the “-weh” in “Yahweh” does not appear to have anything to do with accurately transliterating or Anglicizing the divine name by its ancient Hebrew and Aramaic (and even Greek, as shown in the chart beginning on page 40) forms.

There are no biblical laws against respectful use of the divine name in writing, in worship, or when speaking to others. There are, however, several biblical laws against *misuse* of Jehovah’s name (for example, Exodus 20:7 [“Jehovah will not leave the one unpunished who takes up his name in a worthless way”]; Leviticus 19:12 [“you must not swear in my name to a lie”]; Leviticus 24:11 [you must not “abuse the name” by ‘calling down evil upon it’]). Again, there is no biblical law that prohibits proper use of the divine name and there is no biblical law requiring a strict, exact pronunciation of the divine name in only one language. Only misuses of the divine name are prohibited in the Bible.⁷

Several centuries after the Jews were released from Babylon in the sixth century BCE, Hellenized rabbinic influence gave rise to different treatments of and restrictions on the use of the divine name in greetings, in temple services, in biblical literature, and in biblical commentary. A. Marmorstein writes of the situation this way, “Neither in Egypt, nor in Babylonia, did the Jews know or keep a law prohibiting the use of God’s name, the Tetragrammaton, in ordinary conversation or greetings.”

⁷ There has been much discussion over the meaning of texts such as Lev 24:11 and Amos 6:10, as well as their translation into Greek. Some believe these texts may be early attempts to prohibit the mere use of the divine name (see, for example, J.B. Gabel and C.B. Wheeler, “The Redactor’s Hand in the Blasphemy Pericope of Leviticus XXIV,” *VT* 30.2 [1980], pages 227-229). But see the excellent survey and discussion of possible meanings of the Hebrew text of Lev 24:10-23 by Rodney R. Hutton, “The Case of the Blasphemer Revisited (Lev. XXIV 10-23),” *VT* 49.4 (1999), pages 532-541, who argues that the condemnation in the Leviticus account is of the one who uses the divine name “illegitimately in some way (perhaps in a false accusation or a curse) ... [with the result that] he ‘degraded’ or ‘dishonored’ (God)” (page 540). Even in the LXX the context of the translation of verses 11 and 16 is that of “cursing” (see the use of καταράσθαι [*katara’omai*] in verses 11, 14, and 15) in association with “naming the name.” Thus, contrary to Martin Rösel (“The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch,” *JSOT* 31.4 [June, 2007], page 418) there is no real possibility of a “self-contradiction” in the LXX translation of Lev 24:16 if it, as in 4QLXXLev^b (see below), used Ιαω (*Iao*) or any other form of the divine name. Again, it is clear from the context just what type of “naming” is involved (again, “cursing” or ‘dishonoring’). The same is true for Lev 18:21 (note the use of βεβηλόω [*bebelo’o*], which means to “desecrate” or “profane”). For some reason, Rösel does not consider either the use of *bebelo’o* or *katara’omai* in his discussion. Regarding Amos 6:10, the context is clearly also one where the use of the name is not appropriate because of Jehovah’s judgment against those whom he is about to “strike down.”—Amos 6:11.

Marmorstein adds, "Yet, from the third century [BCE] till the third century [CE] such a prohibition existed and was partly observed."⁸

Samuel Cohon believes the tradition of not using the name in greetings began after the death of "Simon the Just" (291 or 270 BCE if this is Simeon I., son of Onias, or 199 BCE if the reference is to Simeon II., son of Onias II.). This was either due to reverence or "possibly because of Hellenistic persecution."⁹ Cohon also notes that the Greek government was "bent on the Hellenization of the Jews" and "forbade them to mention God's name" in writing.¹⁰ After the Maccabean victory (around 165/164 BCE) "the old practice was restored."¹¹ Even then groups like the Pharisees "upon gaining the upper hand, abolished the practice on the ground that the notes, when cancelled, would be thrown away and the name would thus be defiled."¹² Yet, as Ephraim Urbach points out:

There is a tradition, it is true, that declares 'when Simon the Just died, they ceased to use the Name in the benediction but in another version it is merely stated that 'after the festival he was ill for seven days and died, and his colleagues refrained from using the Name in the benediction.' The meaning may simply be that on account of their grief and mourning the priests refrained for some time after his death from using the Name in the priestly benediction. At any rate, we must not regard this tradition as fundamental and infer from it, in contradiction of all other sources, that a law was promulgated forbidding the use of the Name in the priestly benediction in the Temple. And undoubtedly this tradition did not antedate the enactment [200 CE, from the Mishnah], ordaining 'that a man should use the Name in greeting his fellow' (*M. Berakhot* ix. 5).¹³

⁸ A Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, vol. 1, *The Names and Attributes of God* (New York, NY: Ktav Publishing House, 1968), page 19.

⁹ Samuel S. Cohon, "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology," *HUCA* 23.1, Seventy-fifth Anniversary Publication (1950-1951), page 588 [10] (see also page 591 [13]).

¹⁰ Cohon, "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology," page 588 [10].

¹¹ Cohon, "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology," page 589 [11].

¹² Cohon, "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology," page 589 [11].

¹³ Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), page 128.

Urbach references *Berakhot* 9.5 in the Mishnah, which reads, “And it was ordained that a man should salute his fellow with [the use of] the Name [of God].”¹⁴ After this Ruth 2:4 is quoted where Boaz addresses the harvesters upon his arrival with the words, “Jehovah be with you,” and the harvesters in return address Boaz with, “Jehovah bless you” (NWT). I will return to the discussion of the different uses and prohibitions regarding the divine name later in this chapter, when it is time to discuss the use of the divine name in the New Testament (hereafter, NT). The point here is there is no biblical law or ancient practice against use of the divine name in worship or in social situations by the Jews in general prior to 200 CE. There are only biblical laws (and, hence, likely a general Jewish practice) against certain *misuses* of God’s name.

Using “Lord” or “God” for the Hebrew Bible’s use of the divine name “does not represent the intention of the Hebrew writers themselves; it reflects a device of theologians in post-biblical times by which the utterance of the name of God was to be avoided.”¹⁵ The Bible not only uses the divine name explicitly in nearly seven thousand instances, it also speaks clearly, repeatedly, and emphatically about how God *wants* his people to use his name. Yet, few Bible translations today help make this possible.

By contrast, the *New World Translation* (NWT) published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society uses “Jehovah” in 6,827 of the 6,828 occurrences of the name in BHS.¹⁶ Compare this with the popular *New International Version* (NIV), which does not use the divine name even once. The NIV does not use “Jehovah”; it does not even use “Yahweh”; NIV also does not use “Jah” for either the shorter form of the divine name (see below) or when translating “Hallelujah” (meaning, “Praise Jah”) in either the OT or in the NT. Instead of translating or transliterating the Hebrew name according to a preferred pronunciation, NIV uses “Lord” or “God”

¹⁴ Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), page 10.

¹⁵ J. Obermann, “The Divine Name *YHWH* in the Light of Recent Discoveries,” *JBL* 68 (1949), page 304.

¹⁶ The one exception is Judges 19:18, where the NWT Reference Bible (1984) has a note stating that the reason “Jehovah” was not used is because of textual uncertainty.

or "Praise the LORD" in the OT and "Hallelujah" in the NT.¹⁷ Why, though, did the NIV committee choose not to use an actual form of the divine name? Here is one written explanation:

THE NEW HOLY INTERNATIONAL BIBLE VERSION

Edwin H. Palmer, Th. D., Executive Secretary

28 White Oak Lane, Wayne, N.J. 07470

Executive Committee

Kenneth I. Barker
Dallas Theological
Seminary

Ralph Latta
Nazarene Theological
Seminary

Burton L. Cockland
London Council
Theological Seminary

R. L. Harris
Evangelical Theological
Seminary

Carl S. Kalland
Conservative Baptist
Theological Seminary

Younger R. Kindberg
New York International
Bible Society

Richard N. Longenecker
Wycliffe College

William J. Martin
Regent College

Stephen W. Paine
Houghton College

Robert Preus
Conservative Theological
Seminary

Charles C. Ryrie
Dallas Theological
Seminary

John H. Stick
Calvin Theological
Seminary

Larry L. Walker
Southeastern Baptist
Theological Seminary

J. C. Wenger
Goshen Biblical Seminary

Martin H. Woudstra
Calvin Theological
Seminary

Miss Julie Moore
3531 Cortez
Klamath Falls, Oregon 97601

Dear Miss Julie,

Thank you for your letter and concern about the fact that the NIV did not use the name Jehovah in the Old Testament.

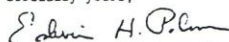
Here is why we did not: You are right that Jehovah is a distinctive name for God and ideally we should have used it. But we put 2½ million dollars into this translation and a sure way of throwing that down the drain is to translate, for example, Psalm 23 as, "Yahveh is my Shepherd." Immediately, we would have translated for nothing. Nobody would have used it. Oh, maybe you and a handful others. But a Christian had to be also wise and practical. We are the victims of 350 years of the King James tradition. It is far better to get two million to read it — that is how many have bought it to date — and to follow the King James, than to have two thousand buy it and miss the grand truth in the Bible on every page because they are following an old fashion translation and have the correct translation of Yahveh.

Furthermore, we do not know if we should say Jahu or Yahweh or Jehovah.

And we do cover ourselves in the preface.

It was a hard decision, and many of our translators agree with you.

Cordially yours,



Edwin H. Palmer

On page 8 I have reproduced a letter written by Edwin Palmer, Executive Secretary of the NIV translation committee, in which he answers the question I asked at the end of the preceding paragraph. As amazing as it may seem, Palmer admits that the

¹⁷ See, for example, the NIV's translation of Psalm 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6, where in the footnotes to "Praise the LORD" NIV shows that it is translating two separate Hebrew words, *halelu* and *Yah* (or "Jah").

NIV committee “should have” used the divine name, but it did not. The reason? According to Palmer it is because doing so would have been a “sure way of throwing [2¼ million dollars] down the drain”! Palmer further states that if the committee had used a form of the divine name in the NIV then they would have “translated for nothing.” So instead they decided “to follow the King James” and mistranslate the Bible in nearly seven thousand instances, though they ‘cover themselves in the preface.’ Palmer and the NIV committee appear to have given little to no thought at all about how Jehovah himself might feel about their decision.

What Palmer and the NIV committee really accomplished was a further ‘victimization’ of the public by mistranslating or not translating the divine name at all thousands of times. Palmer’s excuses are shocking and the NIV’s mistreatment of the divine name, all apparently for the sake of money, is offensive to any worshiper of Jehovah, the God of the Bible. But Palmer is right about one thing: If the NIV had used “Jehovah,” or even “Yahweh,” Jehovah’s Witnesses would have bought and used the NIV more often than they probably do now, not just for this reason, though it is an important consideration to say the least!

Palmer’s excuses and the NIV committee’s decision to not use the divine name for the reasons he gives show how distant many Evangelicals and other Christian groups are from the divine name. Palmer’s remarks also show that many of these same people are quite aware of the unique love Jehovah’s Witnesses have for God’s name. This is a distinction that cannot help but make one think of James’ words in Acts 15:14 regarding the Gentiles, “God for the first time turned his attention to the nations to take out of them *a people for his name*” (emphasis added).

Surely it is no accident that we find God’s name in the Old Testament at least 6,877 times. It is intentional, purposeful. There is also no reason to think that it was anything but intentional for Jehovah to select “a people for his name” from the nations in the first century CE. It would, therefore, not be surprising at all to find him collecting “out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues” those who today “glorify [his] name.”—Revelation 7:9; 15:4.

Reasons for using the divine name found in the Old Testament. In addition to the 6,877 reasons given previously for using the divine name in the Old Testament, the Bible also speaks openly about God's name and how it should be used. Therefore, unless someone can present to me a greater authority on the use of God's name in the Bible than what we read in the Bible itself, I intend to listen to what it says without regard for any "tradition" that says otherwise. Whether it is the tradition of the Jews, the tradition of the King James Version, or the tradition carried on by the NIV and other modern Bible translations and their committees, if the tradition 'invalidates the Word of God' then it should not be followed.—Matthew 15:6.

As for the Bible itself, this is what it says according to a translation that obviously was more concerned about what the text actually says regarding God's holy name, than it was about any traditions concerning the divine name in Jewry or in Christendom:

Exodus 9:16 (NWT)

But, in fact, for this cause I have kept you in existence, for the sake of showing you my power and in order to have my name declared in all the earth.

Jehovah felt so strongly about the 'declaration of his name in all the earth' that he allowed Pharaoh to remain in existence for this very reason. The glorification of his name would be accomplished in this instance through the demonstration of Jehovah's power against Pharaoh and on behalf of his people, which demonstration of power and deliverance continues to be "declared" even to this day. Yet, in spite of the name's occurrence in and its association with this biblical account, few today tell the story of the Exodus by using the name of the God that is actually a part of that history. They remember the story, but they have forgotten the God of the story.

Is the reason people today choose not to use Jehovah's name as a part of the Exodus story because Jehovah himself decided that it was no longer necessary? Did Jehovah at any time decree that his name no longer needed to be "declared in all the earth"? There is no evidence for this, as the name still remains in copies

of the ancient Hebrew text of Exodus available today. Yet, relatively few people choose to use God’s biblical name. By doing this, certain people of the earth are knowingly or unknowingly taking away from the Bible text the glorification that it gives to God’s name because of his acts of greatness and of love. Consider:

Exodus 15:1-3 (NWT)

At that time Moses and the sons of Israel proceeded to sing this song to Jehovah and to say the following: “Let me sing to Jehovah, for he has become highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has pitched into the sea. My strength and [my] might is Jah, since he serves for my salvation. This is my God, and I shall laud him; my father’s God, and I shall raise him on high. Jehovah is a manly person of war. Jehovah is his name.”

Will anyone truly sing the song of Moses without using the actual name of Moses’ God in the song itself? Can you imagine Moses doing so? In effect, Palmer and other scholars of this world who agree with him say to Moses, “People today no longer use God’s name, except for a handful of people like Jehovah’s Witnesses or more recently the Christian Witnesses of Jah, so instead of ‘translating for nothing’ we will not use it either since we would rather have people read or sing your song without God’s name in it than to lose all of the money that we put into making the translation itself. Because if we use God’s name then many people will not read it, or sing your song.” Can you imagine how Moses might reply? Like this, perhaps:

Deuteronomy 31:30-32:1-3 (NWT)

And Moses proceeded to speak in the hearing of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song until their completion: “Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the sayings of my mouth. My instruction will drip as the rain, my saying will trickle as the dew, as gentle rains upon grass and as copious showers upon vegetation. For I shall declare the name of Jehovah.

Moses spoke to the heavens and to the earth, in the hearing of “all the congregation of Israel” he declared “the name of Jehovah.” How anyone today could translate Moses’ words and at the same time silence his declaration of God’s name by removing that name from the words he declared is something only those devoted to the use of the NIV and other translations similarly devoid of God’s name can comprehend. I admit: I cannot comprehend it.

But the NIV and other translations of the Bible that similarly refuse to translate the name of God in the Old Testament text do not stop with the words of Moses. They also gut the song of David. Thankfully, however, the NWT is one popular and available Bible translation that rights this wrong in many places. For example:

Psalm 9:10 (NWT)

And those knowing your name will trust in you, for you will certainly not leave those looking for you, O Jehovah.

“Those knowing your name ...” Jehovah’s Witnesses know God’s name. The Christian Witnesses of Jah know his name and they proclaim it apart from traditions of men that invalidate his word (Matthew 15:6). Certainty over the precise pronunciation of the divine name is not a biblical requirement, nor is certainty needed for any other ancient name (including “Jesus,” as noted earlier). God’s name is not a magical word that must be inflected just right in order to unlock some special power. There is no biblical text or account that teaches or even suggests such a thing.

For those who believe that the Bible presents us with a real (but partial) history of God’s dealings with mankind, it is clear that Jehovah is the author of our linguistic capacities and expressions. This is because in the Bible Jehovah is the one who caused the division of earth’s first human language into many languages, languages that since that time have prevented the same capacity for effective human communication, the kind that is experienced between same-language users (Genesis 11:7). There is nothing to suggest that in doing so he prevented acceptable pronunciations of his name in all the languages that were to come. If Jehovah did in fact lock up the only acceptable pronunciation(s) of his name in one language, or in one dialect of one language (see below, page

112, note 187), then how could his name be “declared in all the earth?”—Exodus 9:16; compare Romans 9:17.¹⁸

Ancient names have equivalents in other ancient languages and in modern languages to the extent that these other (non-original) languages can bear or represent the sounds of the translated (or transliterated [see page 4, note 6]) language’s name. But this does not always result in a phonetic correspondence between the two languages. Try representing a Semitic guttural sound, or capture precisely an ancient aspirant, or vocalize various other Hebrew consonant or vowel sounds in an ancient Indo-European language such as Greek, or in a modern language like English. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to do so and to be so sure that that is how it was done by the ancients.¹⁹

I will revisit questions related to the pronunciation of the divine name again in the next section. For now it is enough to remember that the most widely accepted English or Anglicized pronunciation of the Hebrew name for the biblical God is “Jehovah.” Jehovah’s Witnesses accept this and they continue the *biblical* tradition of David, who ‘trusted’ in Jehovah (Psalm 9:10). The Christian Witnesses of Jah believe that Jehovah accepts modern language pronunciations of his name, especially where

¹⁸ Consider, too, the words of Origen (c. 185-c. 253 CE) in this regard:

Christians in prayer do not even use the precise names which divine Scripture applies to God; but the Greeks use Greek names, the Romans Latin names, and every one prays and sings praises to God as he best can, in his mother tongue. For the Lord of all the languages of the earth hears those who pray to Him in each different tongue, hearing, if I may so say, but one voice, expressing itself in different dialects. For the Most High is not as one of those who select one language, Barbarian or Greek, knowing nothing of any other, and caring nothing for those who speak in other tongues [*Against Celsus*, Book 8, Chapter 37, ANF 4, page 653].

¹⁹ See Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, “The Pronunciation of Hebrew Based Chiefly on the Transliterations in the Hexapla: The Laryngals,” *JQR* 23 [1932-33], pages 258-259, who shows that the “Greeks had no adequate equivalent for Hebrew ׁ [waw]” and that because of this the various transliterations offered for it in Origen’s Hexapla version of the Old Testament are “more conventional than phonetic.” Speiser, “The Pronunciation of Hebrew Based Chiefly on the Transliterations in the Hexapla: The Vowels,” *JQR* 24 (1933-34), page 33, also notes that “Origen had only one letter available for the representation of the Hebrew *a*-vowels: the Greek *a*,” making the transliterations in his Hexapla “powerless to indicate directly the quantitative differences of the Hebrew [*a*-sounds].”

these pronunciations are based on the best available reasons. We recognize that in the Bible God's people use his name, and that God *wants* people to know it and to use it with respect (Psalm 74:10). As I noted earlier, there are biblical laws against *misuse* of the divine name, but there are no biblical laws against using the divine name in one's own language, a language created by God himself (Genesis 11:7). Using the divine name today will allow us to do what David did, at least in this respect:

Psalm 22:22-23; 34:3 (NWT)

I will declare your name to my brothers; in the middle of the congregation I shall praise you. YOU fearers of Jehovah, praise him! ... O magnify Jehovah with me, YOU people, and let us exalt his name together.

Hard pressed you will be to fulfill this scripture if you have allowed yourself to be 'victimized by the King James tradition'! By contrast, you would have no trouble at all joining in with David if you are using the *New World Translation* or a translation of the Bible that actually represents a form of the divine name that is in the text itself, or that is based on the best available reasons. Jehovah knows those who remember and those who forget his name:

Psalm 44:20-21 (NWT)

If we have forgotten the name of our God, or we spread out our palms to a strange god, will not God himself search this out? For he is aware of the secrets of the heart.

Most people on earth today have "forgotten the name of our God." It must be said that were it not for Jehovah's Witnesses, and now the Christian Witnesses of Jah, then Jehovah's name would to a noticeably greater extent be lost from the consciousness of the general public. Those who praise Jah's name should be given credit for not 'forgetting God's name.' But where some have advanced false teachings in Jehovah's name, as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has done on many occasions, they should acknowledge their errors and cease using God's name in

association with uncertain and ever-changing interpretations of Bible chronology,²⁰ unsupported views about the definition and use of blood (see Chapter 9), or in association with unscriptural uses of authority like we see today with the “Governing Body” associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.²¹ The

²⁰ For a discussion of the history of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society’s published views on Bible chronology, see my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, Second Dissertation, pages 61-150.

²¹ The Watchtower Society teaches that in 1919 CE Jesus Christ appointed the “faithful and discreet slave” of Matt 24:45 as a class of people that has continued through to the present day, and that this group is represented by a smaller group from among this class that is itself known as the “Governing Body” (see “A Slave Who Is Both Faithful and Discreet,” *The Watchtower*, March 1, 2004, page 12, par. 18; “Jehovah Trains Shepherds for His Flock,” *The Watchtower*, May 1, 2006, page 26, par. 16). However, Matt 24:45-51 refers only to the ‘appointment’ by Jesus Christ of *individuals* (= “that slave,” “him” [verse 46], “him” [verse 47], “that slave,” “his heart” [verse 48], the third person singular verbs for “eating” and “drinking” [verse 49], “that slave,” the third person singular verbs for “expecting” and “knowing” [verse 50], and “him” again [(twice) verse 51]). Further, not only is this appointment made by Jesus Christ “on arriving” (or ‘when he comes’ [Greek: a form of *erchomai*], Matt 24:46; Lu 12:43), but any such appointment is subject to change based on how this “slave” treats his “fellow slaves” (Matt 24:49) and whether the “slave” follows “the will of his master” (Lu 12:47). Thus, in no sense is any such “slave” above correction by members of the congregations who follow the model of Matt 18:15-17. Yet, the Governing Body of the Watchtower Society does not subject itself to this model by members of its congregations:

We have sound reasons to be grateful for “the faithful and discreet slave” appointed by Jesus Christ over his belongings on earth. ... (Matthew 24:45-47) There certainly is no reason to murmur about it. [“Focus on the Goodness of Jehovah’s Organization,” *The Watchtower*, July 15, 2006, page 20, par. 4 (underline added).]

The only way to find out if there is “no reason to murmur” is to follow Jesus’ counsel to “bear witness concerning the wrong” (Joh 18:23) and ultimately, if necessary, bring the matter to the attention of “the congregation” (Matt 18:17). But the Watchtower Society teaches that “the congregation” here refers only to the organization’s “elders” (“You May Gain Your Brother,” *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1999, page 22, par. 18 [which is based on an alleged parallel to Deut 21:18-21, a text which does specify “the older men” while Matt 18:17 does no such thing]). So there is no way for Jehovah’s Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Society to “speak to the congregation” about any cause for complaint according to Jesus’ model, because the Society’s elders will view such ‘speaking’ as unjustified ‘murmuring’ before the complaint is even heard! The person(s) may then be “disfellowshipped” or excommunicated from the organization before he or she can “speak to the congregation.” Consider:

Many have become apostate because of allowing a complaining spirit to embitter them against Jehovah’s organization. To avoid becoming like them, we must avoid complaining even about small things, “trifles,” but need to be content with revealed truth from Jehovah [= from the organization, for who would not be ‘content with truth

Christian Witnesses of Jah, who are also Jehovah's Witnesses (see Chapter 10), do not emphasize the necessity of any of these things nor do we recklessly associate them or our interpretations of them with God's holy name.

Psalm 45:17; 52:9; 61:8 (NWT)

I will make mention of your name throughout all generations to come. That is why peoples themselves will laud you to time indefinite, even forever. ... I will laud you to time indefinite, for you have taken action; and I shall hope in your name, because it is good, in front of your loyal ones. ... So I will make melody to your name forever.

God's name is to be 'mentioned throughout all generations to come.' In it his people 'will hope;' to it 'melodies' will be sung! 'It is good in front of his loyal ones.' It is not a name given only to translators of the divine word; "scholars" of this world are not the sole keepers of it. Indeed, it is "the afflicted one and the poor one" who will 'praise his name' (Psalm 74:21). These are the people of Jah! The "afflicted one and the poor one" will praise and call upon his name. Therefore, they must know and use his name in their language, a language Jah made possible so that with it we can speak his name:

Psalm 80:18-19; 83:18 (NWT)

And we shall not turn back from you. May you preserve us alive, that we may call upon your own name. O Jehovah God of armies, bring us back. ... That people may know that you, whose name is Jehovah, you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

I cannot find any evidence from the Bible itself justifying the traditions of men who refuse to translate the divine name in the Old Testament. There is no biblical basis whatsoever for taking Jehovah's name out of the mouths of Moses, David, or from the mouths of 'the poor and the afflicted.' The name

from Jehovah'?). ["Finding Contentment with Jehovah's Organization," *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1967, page 470, par. 23 (underlining added).]

“Jehovah,” or “Jah,” must be returned to these songs and again be a part of the praise of God given to him in the Bible:

Psalms 113:1-3; 135:1, 3 (NWT)

Praise Jah, YOU people! Offer praise, O YOU servants of Jehovah, praise the name of Jehovah. May Jehovah’s name become blessed from now on and to time indefinite. From the rising of the sun until its setting Jehovah’s name is to be praised. ... Praise Jah, YOU people! Praise the name of Jehovah ... Praise Jah, for Jehovah is good. Make melody to his name, for it is pleasant.

Indeed:

Psalms 145:21; 148:12-13; 149:1, 3 (NWT)

The praise of Jehovah my mouth will speak; and let all flesh bless his holy name to time indefinite, even forever. ... YOU young men and also YOU virgins, YOU old men together with boys. Let them praise the name of Jehovah, for his name alone is unreachably high. ... Praise Jah, YOU people! Sing to Jehovah a new song, his praise in the congregation of loyal ones. ... Let them praise his name with dancing. With the tambourine and the harp let them make melody to him.

It is not just in the writings of Moses, nor is it only in the Psalms that the Old Testament makes clear just how God’s ancient servants felt about his name, or about how God himself feels about those who use it and those who love it. Consider what several other Old Testament books tell us about God’s name:

Proverbs 18:10; 30:4 (NWT)

The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. Into it the righteous runs and is given protection. ... Who has ascended to heaven that he may descend? Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of both hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in a mantle? Who has made all the ends of the earth to rise? What is his name and what the name of his son, in case you know?

It would not be much of a “tower” for anyone who does not know or use Jehovah’s name! But those who do know it and those

who do use it can tell you for a certainty that it is a “strong tower,” one capable of sustaining you when it seems that all else in the world has failed. It is fitting, too, that we find “his name” paired with that of “his son,” since the name of “Jesus” and his other name, “the Word” (John 1:1; Revelation 19:13), have also been “given among men” for the salvation of those who know both the Son and his Father (John 14:6-7; Acts 4:10-12). But knowing only one of the two names will not allow you to answer Agur’s question, “What is his name *and* what is the name of his [S]on?” Both names should be known, and used.

Isaiah 12:4-5 (NWT)

And in that day YOU will certainly say: “Give thanks to Jehovah, YOU people! Call upon his name. Make known among the peoples his dealings. Make mention that his name is put on high. Make melody to Jehovah, for he has done surpassingly. This is made known in all the earth.

Who today is ‘mentioning that his name is put on high’ apart from the traditions of men? Who among the sons of men make ‘melody to Jehovah’ by singing of it with praise and making it known “in all the earth”? It is Jehovah’s Witnesses who are not loyal to the Watchtower Society *first*, before loyalty to God or to Jesus of Nazareth. Many of these Witnesses today call ourselves “Christian Witnesses of Jah” because we reject what are evidently traditions of men that invalidate what is in God’s Word.—Matthew 15:6.

However, just because I here reference those who call themselves “Jehovah’s Witnesses” or “Christian Witnesses of Jah” does not mean that there are not individuals within other Christian groups who share a similar love for God’s name. It also does not mean that those who claim to be Jehovah’s Witnesses or Christian Witnesses of Jah are immune from the wrath of God for any disrespect they may bring on his name for any false teachings we advance in God’s name. As some point, Jah God himself will determine who it is that has shown love for his name in ways that he approves and he is the one will also address those who treat his name with disrespect, just as he did in times past:

Isaiah 52:5-6 (NWT)

“And now, what interest do I have here?” is the utterance of Jehovah. “For my people were taken for nothing. The very ones ruling over them kept howling,” is the utterance of Jehovah, “and constantly, all day long, my name was being treated with disrespect. For that reason my people will know my name, even for that reason in that day, because I am the One that is speaking. Look! It is I.”

Jehovah knows his people. He knows our sins and he knows the goodness of man, as far as any man or woman can be considered “good” (compare Revelation 3:4). Jehovah will speak to those who ‘know his name’; he will also speak to those who ‘take them for nothing’ and who treat his name ‘with disrespect’; Jehovah will speak to us all, someday. Better it is that he speak to us as those who ‘know his name’ than to have him address us as those who ‘treat it with disrespect.’

Isaiah 52:5-6 also shows that Jehovah does not view the fact that some disrespect his name as a good reason for others not to use it. The disrespect toward his name was, in fact, the very “reason [his] people will know [his] name.” Thus ends the unbiblical, Jewish, and wrongly retained “Christian” tradition of not using God’s name in order to keep it from being disrespected. But claiming to keep God’s name from being mistreated is not the only excuse some have given for causing God’s name to be forgotten:

Jeremiah 16:21; 23:24-27 (NWT)

“Therefore here I am causing them to know; at this one time I shall cause them to know my hand and my mightiness, and they will have to know that my name is Jehovah.” ... “Or can any man be concealed in places of concealment and I myself not see him?” is the utterance of Jehovah. “Is it not the heavens and the earth that I myself actually fill?” is the utterance of Jehovah. “I have heard what the prophets who are prophesying falsehood in my own name have said, saying, ‘I have had a dream! I have had a dream!’ How long will it exist in the heart of the prophets who are prophesying the falsehood and who are prophets of the trickiness of their own heart?”

They are thinking of making my people forget my name by means of their dreams that they keep relating each one to the other, just as their fathers forgot my name by means of Ba'al.

Whether we know it now or not, we will all know God's name someday. We will all know his name "and the name of his son" (Proverbs 30:4). But just as some in Jeremiah's time made others forget God's name "by means of Ba'al" (one of the meanings of which is, interestingly, "lord"), so, too, many today who profess belief in the God of the Hebrew Bible have made millions of people forget his great name by substituting it with "Lord" and "God," titles he is also given (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:2) but neither of which are truly equivalent to or proper substitutes for his unique name. If anyone causes others to 'forget Jehovah's name,' it will not be forever lost:

Zephaniah 3:8 (NWT)

'Therefore keep yourselves in expectation of me,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'till the day of my rising up to [the] booty, for my judicial decision is to gather nations, for me to collect together kingdoms, in order to pour out upon them my denunciation, all my burning anger; for by the fire of my zeal all the earth will be devoured. For then I shall give to peoples the change to a pure language, in order for them all to call upon the name of Jehovah, in order to serve him shoulder to shoulder.'

Jesus himself fulfilled Bible prophecy respecting Jehovah's name, as is recorded in the book of Micah. He came 'in the name of his Father' (John 5:43), the one whom the Jewish religious leaders of his day 'said was their God' (John 8:54):

Micah 5:4-5 (NWT)

And he will certainly stand and do shepherding in the strength of Jehovah, in the superiority of the name of Jehovah his God. And they will certainly keep dwelling, for now he will be great as far as the ends of the earth. And this one must become peace.

Each person has his or her own God, many gods, or no god at all. But those who follow Jesus Christ also worship his God, the Father, Jehovah. Religions of the world today follow other gods, none of whom “created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), none of whom caused the Red Sea to “split apart” (Exodus 14:21), none of whom so graciously put before mankind the choices of “life and death” (Genesis 2:16-17; Deuteronomy 30:19), and none of whom sent his Firstborn Son (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3) to give his life as a legal substitute for our sins, that we might live by means of him (1 John 4:14). Jehovah did these things, or at least there are good reasons to believe that he did them, more so than there are good reasons to believe anything that is said about or attributed to any other god.

There are still two groups of persons distinguishable on earth today when it comes the name of Jehovah: those who ‘will not lay it to heart to give glory to his name’ (Malachi 2:2) and ‘those loving his name’ (Psalm 5:11). The former group cannot ‘make melody to Jah, which is his name’ (Psalm 68:4). The latter group cannot keep from doing it. The latter group, together with the heavenly chorus of Revelation 19 (verses 1, 3, 4, 6), say, “Praise Jah!” The former group uses tradition to invalidate this praise and to rip it even from the shouts of the heavenly hosts. The latter cannot find any scriptural reason to keep Jehovah’s name out of the mouths of Moses and David, so they do not. Tradition does not make invalid the words of God for those who are truly witnesses of Jehovah and of Jesus Christ, and there is not enough money in the whole world to buy their silence.

The vowel points for “Lord” and “Jehovah” from the Masoretic text. As noted earlier, the most widely-known form of the divine name in English is “Jehovah.” This form is popular in large part because of Jehovah’s Witnesses. But why are they and the Christian Witnesses of Jah now practically the only groups giving widespread recognition to this form of God’s name? Further, why do so many Bible translators claim that the divine

name “was never intended by the Jews to be read as Yehowah (or Jehovah)?”²²

While each person must answer the first question based on the best available evidence, when it comes to Bible translators one of the reasons given for not using God's name is the mistaken belief that the form “Yehowah” (or “Jehovah” [Anglicized form]) “represents the vowels of Adonai [Hebrew: ‘Lord’] superimposed on the consonants [YHWH] of Yahweh.”²³ Again, setting aside for the time being the fact that “Yahweh” is Barker's preferred pronunciation for the divine name (to be discussed further below), Barker is simply wrong in his claim that the vowels of *'adonay* have been “superimposed” on the consonants of the divine name, as are all other scholars who have made and who continue to make this claim. Here are some of the good reasons why I believe this is true.

In the time of Jesus, vowel sounds were not represented by the different “points,” dots, and many other markings the way we find them in printed copies of the Hebrew Bible today. Below I will consider the available historical and linguistic evidence supporting the pronunciation of the divine name in the centuries just prior to and following the time of Jesus. But when vowel pointing the Hebrew Bible became a common practice around 1100 CE, the divine name was pointed with several different sets of vowel points, one of which corresponds to *YeHoWaH* (יְהוָה). Here the vowel points may correspond to the English sounds “e” (Hebrew: *shewa*, ְ), “o” (Hebrew: *cholem*, ֹ), and “a” (Hebrew: *qamats qatan*, ִ).

In contrast to this particular vowel pointing of the divine name, the Hebrew word for “Lord,” to which Barker refers, is pointed as *'aDoNaY* (אֲדֹנָי), with the vowel points representing the sounds “a” (Hebrew: *chataph patach*, ְ), “o” (Hebrew: *cholem*, ֹ), and another “a” sound (Hebrew: *qamats qatan*, ִ). The collection of vowel points used with *'aDoNaY* are, therefore,

²² Kenneth Barker, “YHWH Sabaoth: ‘The Lord Almighty,’” in *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1991), page 107.

²³ Barker, “YHWH Sabaoth: ‘The Lord Almighty,’” page 107.

not the same as those used in *YeHoWaH* as this simple comparison shows. In *YeHoWaH* the first vowel point can represent an “e” sound, or what is known in Hebrew as a vocal *shewa*. Together with the first consonant of the divine name (י), which is called a *yod* (basically equivalent to the English “y,” as in “yellow”), this vowel point gives us the first syllable of the divine name, “Ye,” with a short “e” sound. The first vowel point in *’aDoNaY* (Hebrew: *chataph patach*, ךְ) is known as a compound vowel point. This vowel point likely represents an “a” sound, or what is known in Hebrew as a *chataph patach*, which might be considered similar to the Modern English “a” in the word “hard.”

Further, though there is a *shewa* (ְ) vowel point symbol in the first syllable of both *YeHoWaH* and *’aDoNaY*, they are not used for the same purpose. *YeHoWaH* has an initial *shewa* or “e” sound, but it is not the same as the *shewa* used in *’aDoNaY*. This is because the *shewa* in *YeHoWaH* is “vocal” while the *shewa* portion of the *chataph patach* compound vowel point of *’aDoNaY* is silent. Again, the vowel pointing in the first syllable of each of these words is not the same, with a vocalized “e” sound in the first syllable of *YeHoWaH* versus an apparent “a” vowel point sound in the first syllable of *’aDoNaY*.²⁴ Freedman and O’Connor provide the following explanation for this difference:

The Masoretes did not, however, supply the precise vowel points required for their pronunciation, which would have yielded the form *y^hhōwāh*; this form would have violated the very taboo they sought to observe if the first syllable had contained an *a* vowel.²⁵

²⁴ I say “apparent” because we must always be careful not to rule out other possible sounds for Hebrew vowel points than what may be commonly accepted for them today.

²⁵ D.N. Freedman and M.P. O’Connor, “יהוה” *YHWH*,” TDOT 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), page 501. S.R. Driver, “The original form of the name ‘Yahweh’: evidence and conclusions,” *ZAW* 46 (1928), page 20, note 1, makes a similar observation. He believes that the Masoretic vocalization of *Yeho-* and *Yo-* at the beginning of proper names was originally *Ya-* in proper names such as “Jehu” (= the Masoretic form *Yehu*, יהוּ). In Driver’s view, Assyrian transcriptions point to an original Hebrew pronunciation of “Jehu” as *Yahu* (the equivalent of the vocalization יהוּ), which was then changed to *Yehu* sometime between the seventh and the second centuries BCE (as Driver believes is clear from the LXX’s transliterations of “Jehu” by

Joüon and Muraoka similarly remark that the vowel pointing of the divine name יהוה (YeHoWaH) “has an unusual simple shewa instead of [the *chataph patach*] of אֲדֹנָי [’aDoNaY].”²⁶ They also write, “In Codex L. the usual form is יהֶה [YeH-WaH], based on the Aramaic שְׁמָא [She-Ma’, meaning “the name”], i.e. the Divine Name, but rarely יהוה [YeHoWaH].”²⁷ What this means is that in one of the three great representatives of the Masoretic tradition, the Leningrad Codex (B19) of the 11th century CE, the form of the divine name found most often is not יהוה (YeHoWaH), but יהֶה (YeH-WaH).²⁸ Whether these are the points from the Aramaic word for “the name,” as suggested by Joüon and Muraoka, is uncertain. What is certain is that in B19 the divine name is pointed as YeH-WaH in the book of Genesis alone 150 of the 165 times that it occurs.²⁹ In only 12 of the 165 occurrences of the divine name in Genesis in B19 is the divine name pointed as יהוה [YeHoWaH].³⁰ Twice יהֶה (YeH-WiH) occurs,³¹ and in one instance the pointing of the divine name in B19 in the book of Genesis is not clear.—Genesis 2:16.

Ιηου [Ieou], Ειου [Eiou], and Ιου [Iou]) because the pronunciation *Yahu* for our “Jehu” was at that time “felt to resemble too closely the divine name.”

²⁶ Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, vol. 1 (Subsidia Biblica 14/1; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), page 72.

²⁷ Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, vol. 1, page 73.

²⁸ Compare the NWT Reference Bible (1984) notes for Gen 2:8, 22; Lev 3:12; Deut 6:4, 18:5; Ps 18:30; 69:13; Prov 24:21; Isa 12:2. A select review of the Aleppo Codex in the photographic facsimile edition of Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, ed., *The Aleppo Codex* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Bible Project, 1976), shows that this same form (YeH-WaH) is used extensively. See, for examples, Eze 22:23; Zeph 1:6 (twice), 1:8.

²⁹ These numbers are based on my review of every instance of the divine name in the Genesis of *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition*, David N. Freedman, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), as listed by Kohlenberger and Swanson, *The Hebrew English-Concordance to the Old Testament*, pages 630-631, which I then compared with each entry in the *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia*, Aron Dotan, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001). From this comparison I also noted that *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (BHL) does not follow B19 in its pointing of the divine name in Gen 3:14, 9:26, 18:17 (or Ex 3:2), where B19 has YeHoWaH and BHL has YeH-WaH.

³⁰ Gen 3:14; 4:15 (first occurrence); 6:3; 6:7; 9:26; 11:6; 13:10 (first occurrence); 15:7; 18:17; 19:24 (first occurrence); 24:12; 28:13 (second occurrence).

³¹ Gen 15:2, 8. This form has two of the three vowel sounds from ’*elohim* (“God”). But it does not contain the “o” (Hebrew: *cholem*, ם) sound.

Many popular reference works that comment on the name of the biblical God rarely (if ever) mention the form of the name that is found most frequently in B19, again, *YeH-WaH* (יהוה).³² This is a significant point, for if it is the use of the vowels from “Lord” (*’aDoNaY* [hereafter, primarily, *’adonay*]) that such scholars claim is the basis for their using “Lord” instead of pronouncing the divine name with its Masoretic vowel points, and if in fact the precise vowel sounds from *’adonay* are not really ever used with the tetragrammaton, then why use “Lord” at all? Why not simply set aside the tradition of using surrogate titles and use a form of the divine name that is actually based on the vowel pointing of the text or (preferably) based on the best available linguistic and/or other historical evidence?³³

It is clear from our earlier review of evidence that the Masoretes did not use the “precise vowel points” from *’adonay* with the consonants of the tetragrammaton. For this reason, as George Wesley Buchanan writes, “this disputed pointing cannot

³² For example, the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 7 (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1971), on page 680, states: “In the early Middle Ages, when the consonantal text of the Bible was supplied with vowel points to facilitate its correct traditional reading, the vowel points for *’Adonai* with one variation—a *sheva* with the first *yod* of YHWH instead of the [*chataph patach*] under the *aleph* of *’Adonai*—were used for YHWH, thus producing the form *YeHoWaH*.” Though correctly noting the difference in vowel pointings between “Lord” and “Jehovah” in the Masoretic text, this encyclopedia does not mention the more frequently pointed form of the divine name, *YeH-WaH*. Similarly, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 6 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), page 1011, states, “When the Jewish scholars (called Masoretes) added vowel signs to biblical [manuscripts] some time before the 10th century [CE], the Tetragrammaton was punctuated with the vowels of the word *’Adonai* or *’Elohim* to indicate that the reader should read ‘Lord’ or ‘God’ instead of accidentally pronouncing the sacred name.” Again, there is no mention of the form *YeH-WaH*. Finally, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), page 507, says that the Masoretes “left the consonants for *’Yahweh*” in the text but put with them the vowels for *’Adonai* — *ā*, *ō*, *ū*.” This is, as we have seen, simply not true.

³³ Rösel, “The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch,” pages 412-413, argues that even though the Masoretic text regularly has *YeH-WaH*, the scribes “read” or pronounced *’aDoNaY* (“Lord”). Regardless of what the Masoretes read when they came across *YeH-WaH*, the vowel points for any instance of the divine name in the Masoretic tradition do not correspond exactly to those of *’adonay*, as shown above. Further, there are no good biblical reasons supporting a tradition that prefers “Lord,” “God,” “the Name,” or anything but a pronunciation of the actual name of God used in the Bible text.

be used for evidence one way or the other.”³⁴ But Freedman and O'Connor offer an interesting opinion about why the Masoretes did not use the same vowel points from *'adonay* for the divine name. Again, as quoted on page 23 above, they claim that the reason there is such a difference is because using the precise vowel points from *'adonay* would have “violated the very taboo they [the Masoretes] sought to observe,” namely, pronouncing the divine name! Yet, as E.C.B. MacLaurin rightly asks:

If the name YHWH were too sacred to pronounce—so sacred that even the numerals 15, 16 were avoided because being YH, YW, they could be taken as abbreviations of YHWH, why was –yah used in theophoric names and, more seriously, why was Yah used independently ... as the Name of God?³⁵

For example, in Psalm 111:1 the NWT reads: “Praise Jah, you people! I shall laud Jehovah with all my heart.” The divine name “Jah” is here vowel pointed in the Masoretic text of B19 as *YaH* after a form of the Hebrew word הָלַל (*halal*), which means “praise.” From this word we get the expression “Hallelujah,” a combination of the Hebrew word *halal* (“praise”) and the form of the divine name *YaH*, or “Jah.” Here *YaH* is pronounced with an “a” vowel sound (called a *qamats qatan*, אָ), which in Modern Hebrew is basically the same as the “a” vowel sound of *'adonay* (known as a *chataph patach*, אֲ). Unless someone is going to argue that the difference between the “a” sounds of the *qamats qatan* and the *chataph patach* in biblical Hebrew is enough to protect the true pronunciation of the divine name, it is unlikely the Masoretes were doing just that in not using the *chataph patach* of *'adonay* for the first syllable of the divine name.

However, there must be some reason for why the Masoretes chose not to use the “a” sound of *'adonay* (*chataph patach*) and instead used what is considered to be an “e” sound (a vocal *shewa* in the first syllable of the tetragrammaton). If the reason is

³⁴ George W. Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *RevQ* 13 (1988), page 415.

³⁵ E.C.B. MacLaurin, “YHWH: The Origin of the Tetragrammaton,” *VT* 12 (1962), page 447.

there was an “a” sound associated with the *chataph patach* (ֿ) of *’adonay* which was different from the “a” sound of the *qamats qatan* (ָ), different in such a way that if used it would have “violated the very taboo [the Masoretes] sought to observe” (Freedman and O’Connor, as quoted earlier), then we can further isolate the Masoretic tradition’s pronunciation of the divine name by simply supplying the vowel point from *’adonay* that the Masoretes chose not to use!

If the pointing of the divine name as יהוהֿ (YeHoWaH) has anything to do with alerting the reader to use *’adonay* in place of the divine name, then the Masoretes were either trying to keep others from pronouncing the first syllable as *YaH* (that is, with the *chataph patach* [the initial short “a” sound of *’adonay*]), or they were trying to keep people from pronouncing the full form of the divine name as *YaHoWaH* (again, also with the initial *chataph patach* “a” sound). Or it may be that the Masoretes were trying to hide *both* forms or pronunciations of the divine name (*YaH* and *YaHoWaH*) since, again, the Masoretes could have used the short “a” sound (*chataph patach*, ֿ) of *’adonay*.

As noted earlier, instead of using the first syllable vowel point from *’adonay* for *YH* or for the first syllable in *YHWH*, the Masoretes used the “e” sound represented by the vocal *shewa* (ְ). But since we have the pronunciation *YaH* (with a *qamats qatan* “a” sound) used with *YH* as a stand-alone form, the use of a vocal *shewa* instead of the *chataph patach* “a” sound in some Masoretic pointings of the divine name is not likely a choice they made to protect against only a *slight* difference in pronunciation. Indeed, if as in Modern Hebrew these two vowel sounds were pronounced basically alike, then there was no way the Masoretes could have thought they were “preventing the very taboo they sought to observe” by using an “e” sound (vocal *sheva*, ְ) for *’adonay*’s initial “a” (*chataph patach*, ֿ) sound in *YeHoWaH*, and at the same time preventing the same “taboo” by using an “a” (*qamats qatan*, ָ) sound in *YaH* rather than a vocal *shewa* (ְ) or the *chataph patach* “a” sound (ֿ).

The only way it could be said that the Masoretes were ‘avoiding their own taboo’ by using a *qamats qatan* “a” sound in

place of a *chataph patach* “a” sound in *YaH*, would be if they recognized a distinct sound quality associated with their use of a *chataph patach* that they believed more closely represented the true pronunciation of the divine name. If this is true, then the sound (*chataph patach*, *...*) they sought to avoid associating with the first syllable of the divine name must be closer to if not *the* original, first-syllable sound of God's name in Hebrew!

It is good to review the evidence from the Masoretic tradition in this way. It helps answer some important questions and it should also help make us more aware of possible reasons for why the Masoretes treated the divine name the way they did. The best available evidence shows clearly that they did *not* use the precise vowel points of *'adonay* with the tetragrammaton. Ultimately, though, the evidence from the Masoretes is not very conclusive concerning the ancient, pre-Masoretic pronunciation of the divine name. But there is much better evidence from much earlier times regarding the pronunciation of the divine name that will now be presented and considered in relation to the use of “Jehovah” and other forms of the divine name today.

Early Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek forms of the divine name. The earliest recorded use of the divine name in the Bible is in Genesis 2:4, where Jehovah God is credited with the creation of the heavens and the earth. The earliest dateable use of the divine name outside of the Bible, but related to it, is found in the Moabite Stone. Discovered in 1868, this tablet supports events recorded in the biblical account of 2 Kings 3 regarding the conflict between Israel and Moab. It is dated to between 840-830 BCE.³⁶

On this stone tablet the divine name is written in four ancient Hebrew or Phoenician (an ancient dialect of Hebrew) letters on line 18, the translation of which appears to describe King Mesha of Moab as having ‘taken vessels of Jehovah and presented them before Chemosh.’³⁷ Speaking in reference to the use of the four-

³⁶ See J.A. Emerton, “The Value of the Moabite Stone as an Historical Source,” VT 52.4 (2002), pages 483-492.

³⁷ Compare Freedman and O'Connor, “יהוה YHWH,” page 502. A. Cowley, “A Passage in the Mesha Inscription, and the Early Form of the Israelitish Divine Name,” JRAS (April, 1920), pages 175-184, argues for a different reading of the inscription,

letter form of the divine on the Moabite Stone, Harris notes it “would be odd indeed if Mesha had copied the name of the Hebrew deity in a Moabite orthography and added letters that weren’t there.”³⁸

This suggests that this early four-letter form of the name on the Moabite Stone was likely an early Hebrew form. If so, this would provide us with the earliest written evidence of the tetragrammaton, *YHWH*, the full four-letter form of the divine name. But the ancient Hebrew used here does not contain any vowel points such as we find much later in the Masoretic Bible texts discussed above. Therefore, even though some of the letters may indicate certain vowel sounds, we cannot know for a certainty the ancient pronunciation of the four-letter form of the divine name used in the Moabite Stone at the time it was written.³⁹

namely, taking יהוה (the tetragrammaton) as a verb with the resulting restoration of the text being, “But I took away that which should be for myself and tore them in pieces before Kemosh” (Cowley, “A Passage in the Mesha Inscription,” page 184). Cowley bases this reading in part on the fact that the earliest forms of the divine name outside of the Moabite Stone are יי (*YW*) and יהו (*YHW*), and so יהוה must be the verb “to be” (= “that which should be for myself” rather than “that which [belonged to] Jehovah”). It is Cowley’s view that יי (*YW*) is the earliest form of the divine name, that the form יהו (*YHW*) represents “the same pronunciation (Yāw), and that at some point in time between the date of the ostraka from Samaria (say 900 B.C.) and the Aramaic papyri, the practice arose of writing a ה [heh] to represent a long vowel” (Cowley, “A Passage in the Mesha Inscription,” page 178). But while יי (*YW*) does appear as an early theophoric prefix and suffix in proper names (see note 55 below), it is never found as a stand-alone form of the divine name as are יה (*YH*), יהו (*YHW*), or יהוה (*YHWH*), forms I will discuss in more detail below. Further, there does not seem to be any reason for why we should think that King Mesha felt that the objects in view “should be” for himself when he subsequently ‘gives them’ to Chemosh! The contest appears to involve the taking of that which belonged to one God, Jehovah, and the giving of these same things to Chemosh. Thus, there are good reasons for regarding the occurrence of the tetragrammaton on the Moabite Stone as the earliest instance of the four-letter form of the divine name and not as an instance of the Hebrew verb “to be.”

³⁸ R. Laird Harris, “The Pronunciation of the Tetragram,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1974), page 223.

³⁹ Ancient Hebrew letters that indicate vowel sounds are known as *matres lectionis* (“mothers of reading”). For examples, see Ziony Zevit, *Matres Lectionis in Ancient Hebrew Epigraphs*, David Noel Freedman, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980), pages 12-15. However, according to Sandra Gogel, “When dealing with proper names in epigraphic Hebrew, one is uncertain of the

The four-letter form of the divine name is also found in Hebrew inscriptions discovered while excavating a citadel on the biblical Arad (Judges 1:16), as well as on inscriptions unearthed in southern Palestine in what is considered to be the biblical city of Lachish (Jeremiah 34:7), all of which are from the late sixth century BCE.⁴⁰ In these inscriptions the tetragrammaton occurs numerous times in salutations and in oaths. With respect to the Lachish inscriptions, which “provide glimpses of the workings of the royal administration, primarily military, in this period shortly before the Babylonian exile,” Dennis Pardee writes “that there is no indication in any of these texts that the divine name (the ‘tetragrammaton’) was not used currently nor that it was not pronounced as written, i.e., something along the lines of [‘Yahweh’].”⁴¹

However, though we can say how the divine name was “written” in such early texts, “the precise vocalization of the name is uncertain”⁴² since we cannot say for sure whether the letters in such early texts were purely consonantal or what vowels they for a certainty indicated in different places.⁴³ But early evidence for the use of the divine name does not only support the four-letter form of the divine name, the tetragrammaton. Other forms of God’s name are also represented in early Hebrew and Aramaic.

orthographic conventions followed.” Gogel also notes that even in theophoric affixes such as *-yhw* and *yw-* the view that some of the consonants are actually vowel sounds (“mothers of reading”) is an “assumption” that is “not absolutely certain” (Sandra Landis Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* [Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998], pages 57, 58 [but see the balance of her discussion on “Final” and “Internal” *matres lectionis* on pages 58-74]).

⁴⁰ See James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), pages 321-322, 568-569; Freedman and O’Connor, “יהוה” *YHWH*,” pages 503-504.

⁴¹ Dennis Pardee, “Lachish Ostraca,” in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 3, *Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, William W. Hallo, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2002), page 78, note 3.

⁴² Pardee, “Lachish Ostraca,” page 78, note 3.

⁴³ See Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew*, pages 59-60, where it is observed that the final *heh* (which is the last letter in the tetragrammaton [יה]) can represent a long *a*, a long *e*, and a long *o* in epigraphic Hebrew, that is, in Hebrew found on ancient inscriptions.

For example, from the early fifth to the early fourth centuries BCE (from 495 to 399 BCE) there is “evidence for a Jewish garrison with a full-size Temple” on the island of Elephantine, near Aswan in Egypt.⁴⁴ This Jewish community made regular use of the form *YHW* (the first three letters of the tetragrammaton) for the name of God. However, though it is used as a part of place or personal names (concerning which, see below) in the Bible, it is not therein used as a stand-alone name of God (but see below on the use of the equivalent Greek, three-letter form of the divine name used in at least one very important Greek Bible manuscript). However, as noted earlier, the Bible does use both the four-letter tetragrammaton (*YHWH*) and a two-letter form of God’s name, *YH*

⁴⁴ Bezalel Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), page 18. For examples of the divine name in these papyri, see Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, pages 107, 140, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147, 151, 159, 160, 196, 205, 212, 213, 216, 217, 223, 237, 241, 242, 245, 246, 248, 249, 251, 266. The example on page 266, TAD B7.3, has *YHW* as a theophoric element in a longer name for the local god, “Anath*YHW*,” which could suggest that “Anath*YHW*” or even “*YWH*” was a creation of ‘Arameans from Israel who migrated to Egypt’ (Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, page 266, note 7). The form *YHH* is also found once as a part of a compound expression (1.2), once standing alone (13.14) in the Elephantine papyri (see A.E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005 (1923)], pages 1, 2, 37, 38, 40), and at least eight times in a formulaic expression in ostraca (pottery inscriptions) from the same site (see Freedman and O’Connor, “יהוה *YHWH*,” page 504). Driver, “The original form of the name ‘Yahweh,’” pages 22-23, writes that this form is also found “on jar-handles of the 5th or 4th century B.C., found at Jericho and Jerusalem,” and on a coin “issued probably between 405 and 380 B.C., in Phoenicia or Philistia.” The form *YHH* is represented in figure 1.1 below as an equivalent to the Greek form Ιω (Iao). The reason for this is because this form (*YHH*) appears to use a second *heh* (ה) to represent the same sound indicated by the final *waw* (ו) in the form *YHW* (the other form of the name used in the Elephantine Papyri) which final sound is likely either “o” (as in “Ya[*YH*]-o[*H*]”) or “u” (as in “Ya[*YH*]-u[*H*]”). Compare D.D. Luckenbill, “The Pronunciation of the Name of the God of Israel,” *AJSLL* 50.4 (July, 1924), pages 281-282. In contrast, Driver, “The original form of the name ‘Yahweh,’” page 21, believes the *heh* in both *YHW* and *YHH* “serves the purpose only of maintaining the *a*-sound” (which Driver would represent as “Ya[*H*]H” [for *YHH*] and “Ya[*H*]W” [for *YHW*]), making both *YHW* and *YHH* representatives of “the same pronunciation to the tetragrammaton when standing independently,” as in the vocalization “Ya,” which is the name of God before the time of the Exodus according to Driver (“The original form of the name ‘Yahweh,’” page 25). Driver’s explanation, though possible, runs contrary to the apparently corresponding transliteration of such forms by the Greek *Iao*, which I will discuss further later in this section.

(*YaH*, or in English, “Jah”), as stand-alone names.⁴⁵ The Hebrew and Aramaic forms of the divine name that occur apart from place or personal names in the Dead Sea Scrolls are also either four-letter or two-letter forms.⁴⁶ These forms are written in Aramaic square script (as in 1QIsa^a) or in an older Hebrew script (as in 1QIsa^c).⁴⁷

Now that we have this ancient Hebrew and Aramaic evidence before us, what does it say about the pronunciation of the divine name? Since we do not know for sure whether certain letters in these early, pre-Masoretic texts represented vowel sounds (and if so which vowel sounds they may have represented), and since we do not know for sure whether we can rely on possible etymologies of the divine name for its proper pronunciation (see the discussion of Exodus 3:14 at the end of this chapter), we need additional evidence before reaching any further conclusions. Buchanan provides a helpful introduction to some of the remaining evidence:

When trying to find the correct pronunciation of an ancient name that worshippers stopped pronouncing, it seems methodologically reasonable to search ancient texts for possible

⁴⁵ See page 3, notes 4 and 5.

⁴⁶ For a list of the occurrences of these forms of the divine name in the Scrolls, see Martin G. Abegg, Jr., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pages 296-297. There are also certain circumlocutions and surrogates in the Scrolls from Qumran and elsewhere, as in the Ben Sira Masada Scroll and the Cairo Genizah fragments. “Circumlocutions” are representational words or letters intended to avoid actual use of another word. For a discussion of the different treatments of the divine name in these scrolls and in other documents from the Judean desert, see George Howard, “The Tetragram and the New Testament,” *JBL* 96 (1977), pages 66-70; Emmanuel Tov, “4QLev^{c,g} (4Q25, 26a, 26b),” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz, eds. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pages 265-266; D.W. Parry, “4QSam^a and the Tetragrammaton,” in *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks, eds. (STDJ 20; Leiden Brill, 1996), pages 106-125; and Parry, “Notes on Divine Name Avoidance in Scriptural Units of the Legal Texts of Qumran,” in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues, Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies Cambridge 1995*, Moshe Bernstein, Florentino Martínez and John Kampen, eds. (STDJ 23; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pages 437-449.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the different scripts used for the divine name in the Qumran scrolls, see Jonathan P. Siegel, “The Employment of Paleo-Hebrew Characters for the Divine Names at Qumran in the Light of Tannaitic Sources,” *HUCA* 42 (1971), pages 159-172.

clues that would give some hints. These can be found in Greek translations of the Hebrew before the pronunciation was discontinued, in proper names that include the divine name, in poetry whose meter depends on the number of syllables involved, and the pronunciation of the last syllable.⁴⁸

Before considering the available evidence from early and late Greek forms of the divine name, let us first consider the forms of the divine name that are included in proper names in the Bible and in ancient inscriptions as early as the ninth century BCE. Then we can review Buchanan’s findings relative to poetry and “the pronunciation of the last syllable.” Finally, we will consider the Greek evidence for the pronunciation of the divine name.

When used as part of other proper names, the two-letter (יה [YH] or even י [YW]) and three-letter (יהו [YHW]) forms are found in early Hebrew, Aramaic, and Assyrian sources.⁴⁹ The clearest textual evidence for the pronunciation of these forms of the divine name comes from the vowel pointing of the Masoretic text. But as is true of the Masoretic evidence for the stand-alone, four-letter form of the name (the tetragrammaton), we cannot be certain of the accuracy of the vowel sounds indicated by the Masoretes for forms of the divine name that are used as part of other proper names. Still,

⁴⁸ Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 418.

⁴⁹ Driver, “The original form of the name ‘Yahweh,’” pages 7-19; Luckenbill, “The Pronunciation of the Name of the God of Israel,” pages 278-279; Freedman and O’Connor, “יהוה YHWH,” pages 506-509; A.R. Millard, “YW and YHW,” VT 30.2 (1980), page 210; Ziony Zevit, “A Chapter in the History of Israelite Personal Names,” BASOR 250 (spring, 1983), pages 1-14; Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 417; Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew*, Appendix: Texts and Seals, pages 385-494. Zevit provides twenty-three examples of “twinning names,” that is, where biblical names such as “Ahaziah,” “Amaziah,” “Adonijah,” and other names occur with both the two-letter (יה-) and the three-letter (יהו-) theophoric suffixes (Zevit, “A Chapter in the History of Israelite Personal Names,” pages 10-13). Regarding the “stages in the development of [the use of the forms of the names] in these texts,” Zevit writes that “they are beyond reconstruction” (Zevit, “A Chapter in the History of Israelite Personal Names,” page 13). He also notes that: “Sociolinguistic processes, which are beyond reconstruction but which had both synchronic and diachronic aspects, gave rise to situations in which different texts or types of texts referred to the same person by either the long or short form of the same name” (Zevit, “A Chapter in the History of Israelite Personal Names,” page 14).

with this qualification of the Masoretic evidence in mind, consider the following:

Although the pointing of the Masoretic Tetragrammaton may not be reliable, there are scores of proper names that include parts of the Tetragrammaton. Names like Jonathan in Hebrew is *Yaho-nathan*, “Yaho has given.” If one syllable was dropped by contraction, it was not the *ô* but the *â* sound that suffered. Yahonathan was sometimes spelled Yonathan. John was spelled, *Yaho-CHANAN*, “Yaho has been gracious.” Elijah’s name was *Eli-Yahu*, “My God is Yahu.” Yaho-shapat was spelled *Yaho-shapat*, “Yaho has judged.” Some names have variant spellings. For example, sometimes Jeremiah’s name is *Yeremi-Yahu* and sometimes *Yeremi-Yah*; Zecharia is sometimes *Zekar Yahu* and sometimes *Zekar Yah*, showing that abbreviation was permissible, but throughout the entire Hebrew Scripture, there is no proper name, using the Tetragrammaton either at the beginning or at the ending that comes out “Yahweh,” omitting the middle syllable. It is reasonable to think that when parents named their children after deities they would have pronounced their names the way they understood the deity’s name to have been pronounced. Names like Ishbaal, “Man of Baal,” and Baalyasha, “Baal has saved,” for example, were probably pronounced according to the true pronunciation of Baal, and Obed-Yahu, “Slave of Yahu,” was probably pronounced according to the true pronunciation of Yahu, with the possible addition of an unspelled aspirant *ah*, “*ObedYahuwah*,” or abbreviated to “Obed-Yah.”⁵⁰

One of Buchanan’s points is that where the three-letter form of the divine name is used (as part of proper names in the Bible) there is a second syllable in the pronunciation. This means also that when the divine name has a fourth letter (*heh*, the final *H* [ה]) it may have had three syllables (as in *YaHuWaH* or *YaHoWaH*). Or the fourth letter (again, the final *H*) may have represented

⁵⁰ Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 417. See also George Wesley Buchanan, “How God’s Name Was Pronounced,” *BAR* 21.2 (March-April 1995), page 31.

something else. Later in this section I will put forth a new theory for the pronunciation of the divine name that builds on existing theories and evidence. I will also suggest a form of the name for the biblical God around which I believe a pronunciation most will agree can be accepted without dispute, for personal and for public use, and in Bible translation.

There are some (including me) who believe that certain letters of the divine name may indicate vowel sounds rather than stand for consonants. For example, Luckenbill argued that the final letter of *YHWH* from the Moabite Stone indicates a long “o” sound, which results in something like “Yaho” as the pronunciation of *YHWH*.⁵¹ This pronunciation is consistent with the use of the three-letter form of the divine name in proper names in the Bible and in other early literature, as well as with its use as an independent word in the Elephantine papyri.⁵² A Hebrew/Aramaic pronunciation of “Yaho” is also consistent with ancient and well-known Greek forms of the divine name, such as *Ιαω* (*Iao*), which are presented in figure 1.1 below. But, again, the form of the divine name on the Moabite Stone may be consonantal or some of the letters may indicate certain vowel sounds. The answer is still uncertain, though I will come back to this question later in this section.

Now comes the evidence from Hebrew poetry, “whose meter depends on the number of syllables involved.” Buchanan refers to and cites several texts from the song of Moses and the sons of Israel after God destroyed the Egyptians as they attempted to cross the Red Sea. This song is recorded in Exodus Chapter 15. Here are several of the examples given by Buchanan, reproduced with most of the diacritical marks that he presented in his article⁵³ which will

⁵¹ Luckenbill, “The Pronunciation of the Name of the God of Israel,” pages 280-283.

⁵² Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B. C.*, page xviii, says that this name (יהוה, *YHW*) “is not an abbreviation of יהוה [YHWH], but an earlier form, and only another way of writing the earliest [in Cowley’s opinion] form י [YW, ‘Yo,’ or ‘Ya-o,’ or ‘Ya-u’].” See note 37 above for more on Cowley’s view of the earliest form of the divine name and its relationship to other forms. See note 55 below for more on the use of YW as a theophoric element in other proper names.

⁵³ Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 418. See also Buchanan, “How God’s Name Was Pronounced,” page 31.

allow those familiar with these marks to see the precise vocalic representation indicated. Those unfamiliar with such marks can simply pronounce the letters as they recognize them, though I suggest the use of an aspirated (in this case, a “breathing out” sound for) “ah” when this element occurs in a word-final position:

Exodus 15:1:	'Ašîrâh laYâhweh kî ga'oh gâ'âh.
Exodus 15:1:	'Ašîrâh laYahôwâh kî ga'oh gâ'âh.
Exodus 15:6:	Yemînekâ, Yâhweh, ne'ddârî bakkoah; yemînekâ, Yâhweh, tir'as 'ôyêb.
Exodus 15:6:	Yemînekâ, Yahôwâh, ne'ddârî bakkoah; yemînekâ, Yahôwâh, tir'as 'ôyêb.
Exodus 15:17:	Mâkôn lešibttekâ pâ'alттâ, Yâhweh.
Exodus 15:17:	Mâkôn lešibttekâ pâ'alттâ, Yahôwâh.

I believe that anyone reading the above will agree with me and with Buchanan that the lines “sound rough and unrhythmical when the Tetragrammaton is pronounced ‘Yahweh’ but smooth and poetic when pronounced ‘Yahowah.’”⁵⁴ With that in mind, let us look closer at some of the other evidence involving other Hebrew and Aramaic forms of the divine name. Then we will consider the Greek evidence.

As discussed previously, the primary Hebrew and Aramaic forms of the Jewish name for God inside and outside of the Bible, standing alone or as a part of proper names, are the forms *YH*, *YHW*, *YHWH*, with some early use of *YW*.⁵⁵ In the Bible the

⁵⁴ Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 418.

⁵⁵ Driver, “The original form of the name ‘Yahweh,’” pages 7-8, notes that on Israelite ostraca dated to “the latter half of the 9th cent. B.C. or, less probably, to the first half of the following century, the divine name always takes the form יָ [YW], both at the beginning and at the end of proper names.” Zevit (*Matres Lectionis in Ancient Hebrew Epigraphs*, page 12, note 14) states well the complications involved in the development and use of YW in proper names:

The history of the pronunciation of this theophoric element in personal names is extremely difficult to trace for any number of reasons: 1) The data in inscriptions are distributed chronologically over many centuries, linguistically over many languages and dialects, and are represented in many orthographic systems involving unique conventions. Although equations may be established between the representation of the element in one system and its representation in another, phonetic equivalence may not

primary stand-alone form (by a large margin!) is *YHWH* (English: “Jehovah”). It occurs 6,828 times in the standard Hebrew text (BHS) of the Bible used for most translations of the OT today. The stand-alone form *YH* (English: “Jah”) occurs a respectable number of times (49) in the OT. The form *YHW* only occurs once in the OT as a stand-alone name for God, and this is in the Greek form *Iao* that is found in an ancient fragment of the LXX of Leviticus (4QLXXLev^b). It is possible, however, that the Greek *Iao* was used to represent the four-letter name of God, as I will soon explain. But apart from this three-letter Greek form, the three-letter Hebrew or Aramaic form *YWH* does not stand alone in the Bible as a name for God. Still, it is used as such in the Aramaic papyri from Elephantine (as is the three-letter form *YHH*), and the forms *YHW* and *YH* both occur as part of place and personal names in- and outside of the Bible at different times from as early as the ninth century BCE.⁵⁶

But in pre-Masoretic times it is unclear just what precise Hebrew, Aramaic, or other ancient language pronunciations were given to these forms in various locations, at the same or different times or in different dialects. Though the Masoretic evidence provides us with a basis for certain older and some modern pronunciations of the name, it is not clear which pronunciations (if any) in the Masoretic text may be correct indications of a particularly ancient (or original) pronunciation when standing alone or when used as a part of other proper names. The evidence from the use of the divine name in the Masoretic text’s pointing of the two- and three-letter forms of the divine name (*YH* and *YHW*, respectively) in proper names supports a second syllable pronunciation of *Hu* (as in *Ya-Hu*) or *Ho* (as in *Ya-Ho*). The lack

be assumed unless worked out by inner reconstruction from within each system. 2) The significance of the element in Israelite personal names from the biblical period onward may have resulted in socio-linguistic factors complicating the issue even more. Archaic or archaizing pronunciations may have been maintained which diverged from the apparent phonetic realization of a conventionalized orthography, or *vice versa*, an archaic, nonphonetic orthography may have been maintained after sound changes had affected the pronunciation. This is exemplified in the post-Exilic books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

⁵⁶ See the references in note 44 for dates on the various early uses of these forms.

of the four-letter form of the divine name as a part of other proper names could mean the fourth letter stands for or marks something already represented by the three-letter form (*YHW*).

In other words, it could be that the fourth letter in *YHWH*, the final *heh* (ה [H]), simply serves as a vowel indicator for what may be the three-letter form's final-syllable vowel sound. If this is so, then it would make *YHWH* the equivalent of *YHW* by being vocalized along the lines of *YaH-Wo(H)*. Here the final *heh* serves as a vowel indicator (a *mater lectionis*) and not as a consonant. This would then explain why *YHWH* never occurs as a part of other personal names while *YHW* does, that is, because they both represent the same name pronounced the same way!

My review of the evidence suggests that the final letter of the three-letter form of the divine name (*waw* [ו]) may also represent an aspirated "o" sound.⁵⁷ This is consistent with the likely pronunciation of the best Greek representation of the divine name available, namely, Ιαω [*Iao*]). This could mean that both the two-letter (*YH*) and three-letter (*YHW*) forms of the divine name that occur in proper names in- and outside of the Bible, may in fact represent the two independently pronounced forms of the divine name *inclusive* of the pronunciation associated with the four-letter tetragrammaton.

Of course, it is also possible that the final *heh* in *YHWH* represents an aspirated "ah" sound, or some other "breathed out" sound in addition to the "o" or "u" sound indicated by the third letter of the tetragrammaton, *waw* (ו). As noted above, with examples provided by Buchanan, the evidence from the pointing of the Masoretic text in poetic sections of the OT supports a pronunciation of three syllables for the four-letter form of the divine name (*YHWH*), with the same final aspirant that was observed with "Yahowah" in the selections from Exodus 15. In those texts, "Yahowah" sounds much more rhythmical than "Yahweh." But what would these same selections look like, or more appropriately *sound* like with "Yah-wo(h)" in place of

⁵⁷ See note 43. Also, compare note 44 regarding the use of final *heh* in the three-letter form of the divine name *YHH* in the Elephantine Papyri.

“Yahowah”? You can make the substitute yourself by using the examples provided on page 36 above. In my opinion, with my substitutions, Exodus 15:1 still sounds ‘smooth and rhythmical’ with “Yah-wo(h)” and in 15:6 or 15:17 “Yah-wo(h)” also sounds acceptable, especially with a “breathed out” final syllable.

What, though, does the evidence from early Greek forms of the divine name tell us about the name’s early pronunciation by Jews, by Christians, and by others? Consider figure 1.1 below, which contains a listing of different Greek forms of the divine name occurring in literature that speaks to the early use and/or the early (pre-Masoretic) pronunciation of the divine name.

Figure 1.1

Greek Forms of the Divine Name and their Corresponding Hebrew/Aramaic Forms with English Transliterations

GREEK FORMS	HEBREW / ARAMAIC FORMS	ENGLISH TRANSLITERATIONS AND APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATIONS
Ιαω	יהוה, יהה, יהר	Greek: <i>Ia-o</i> , from “Yah-wo(h),” “Ye-wo(h),” “Ya-ho(h)” or “Ya-ho,” all of which could represent pronunciations of any of the corresponding Hebrew/Aramaic forms listed.
Ιαωια Ιαη	יהו+יה יה	Greek: <i>Ia-o-ia</i> , from a combination of the Hebrew “Ya-ho” or “Ye-ho” and “Yah.” Greek: <i>Ia-e</i> or <i>Ia</i> , from the Hebrew “Yah” (see note 65)
Ιαου Ιαουε	יהר יהרה	Greek: <i>Ia-ou</i> or possibly <i>Ia-o</i> , from “Ya-hu,” “Ye-hu,” “Ya-ho,” or “Ye-ho.” Greek: <i>Ia-ou-e</i> or possibly <i>Ia-o-e</i> , from “Ya-hu-weh” or “Ye-hu-weh,” or “Ya-ho-weh” or “Ye-ho-weh.”
Ια	יה	Greek: <i>Ia</i> , from the Hebrew “Yah.”
Ιεω Ιε	יהוה יהר	Greek: <i>Ie-u-o</i> , possibly from a Hebrew “Ye-hu-wo(h).” Greek: <i>Ie-u</i> , possibly from “Ye-hu.”
Ιαωθ	יהרה, יהר	Greek: <i>Ia-oh</i> , from “Ya-ho” or “Ye-ho,” with the Greek <i>theta</i> (θ) serving as a sign of aspiration (see note 69). ⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Some believe that this form (Ιαωθ) is a combination of the shortest form of the divine name, “Yah,” and the ending of the Hebrew word **צְבָאוֹת**, which is transliterated into Greek as *σαβαωθ* (*sabaoth*, meaning “hosts” or “armies,” as in ‘Jehovah of armies’). But see the explanation of the ending of the Greek form of the divine name with *theta* (θ) by Irenaeus in note 69 below.

Ιαηλ	יְהוָה	Greek: <i>Ia-el</i> , from a combination of “Yah” and <i>’el</i> (the Hebrew word for “God”). ⁵⁹
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In the above chart, in the discussion preceding it, and in the discussion which now follows I have attempted to give as much relevant information about Greek forms of the divine name and their equivalents in Hebrew/Aramaic as I think is practical to here give. I believe that the good reasons I here present will allow me to make reasonable conclusions regarding the ancient and the modern pronunciation of the divine name, particularly as it relates to the use of the Anglicized names “Jehovah,” “Jaho,” and “Jah.”

Ιαω occurs in one of the earliest and best representatives of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint (or LXX). In 4QLXXLev^b (dating from the first century BCE [see page 67, note 113]), there are two occurrences of this form of the divine name, namely, in Leviticus 3:12 and in 4:27. This text, its implications for the use of the divine name in the LXX in general and even in the NT where it quotes from the OT, will be considered later in this chapter. Ιαω also occurs in the writings of Diodorus Siculus,⁶⁰ Tertullian,⁶¹ Origen (see note 65),

⁵⁹ M.D. Johnson, “Life of Adam and Eve,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, James H. Charlesworth, ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), page 285, note 29b; L. Wells, “The Books of Adam and Eve,” in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, R.H. Charles, ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1964 [1913]), page 148, note “4. Jael.” This Greek form of the divine name is similar to the form of the divine name used in the Hebrew of 3 Enoch for the angel Metatron, who is also known as the “lesser YHWH” (3 Enoch 12:5) in contrast to the “greater YHWH” (3 Enoch 48B:1[44]). It is also used of an archangel who is actually named “Yaho’el,” which “probably originated in speculation about the angel in whom God’s name resides, according to Exodus 23:20f.,” which angel is identified in 3 Enoch 12:5 as “Metatron.” See P. Alexander, “3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, James H. Charlesworth, ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), page 244. This form of the name is similar to the “Iaoel” of the Apocalypse of Abraham, a work that may have originally been written in Hebrew (but preserved today only in Slavonic) in the late first or early-to-middle second century CE (see 10:3 and 17:3 in R. Rubinkiewicz and H.G. Lunt, “The Apocalypse of Abraham,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, pages 693, 697).

⁶⁰ Around 30 BCE Diodorus completed a famous “Library of History” in which he writes that among the Jews Moses “referred his laws to the god who is invoked [ἐπικαλούμενον] as Iao [Ἰαώ]” (1.94.2; LCL series of Diodorus’ works, vol. 1, page 321). This reference from Diodorus is also cited by Justin Martyr (who died around

Varro,⁶² Jerome,⁶³ and in early Onomastica.⁶⁴ **Ιαω** and **Ιαη** both occur in the writings of Origen.⁶⁵ **Ιαου** and **Ιαουε** are from the

165 CE) in his *Hortatory Address to the Greeks* (see ANF 1, chap. 9, page 277). Frank Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of **Ιαω**,” (Ph.D. diss.: University of Cincinnati, 2002), pages 45-74, notes that Diodorus’ use of *Iao* in this passage suggests that he was using a term that his audience could relate to since they were familiar with it the same as they were familiar with other groups and figures mentioned by Diodorus, namely, the early “Arians,” “Hestia,” and the “Good Spirit.”

⁶¹ In his *Against the Valentinians* (ANF 3, chap. 14, page 511) Tertullian (c. 160-c. 220 CE) refers to the use of the name *Iao* which “comes to be found in the Scriptures [Latin: *inde inuenitur Iao in scripturis*]” (see *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 47, Aemilii Kroymann, *Q. Sept. Florent. Tertulliani Opera*, part 3 [Academiae Litterarum Caesareae Vindobonensis, 1906], page 193).

⁶² In a fragment preserved by John Lydus (a mid-6th century CE Constantinople official), the Roman scholar Varro (116-27 BCE) when defining the Jewish God “says he is called *Iao* [Ἰαώ] in the Chaldaean mysteries.” Lydus connects this *Iao* to Herennius Philo of Byblos’ (concerning whom, see note 68 below) claim that the meaning of this name “in the Phoenician language” is “intelligible light” (Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2 [Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980], page 141, under 324; see also Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 1 [Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976], page 211, under 75).

⁶³ Jerome (c. 342-c. 420 CE), in his “Commentary on Psalm 8,” writes: “The name of Lord in Hebrew language contains four letters, Yod He Waw He; it is the proper name of God and can be pronounced as Yahô [Latin: *legi potest IAHO*]” (as translated by G.J. Thierry, “The Pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton,” *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 5 [1948], page 34; see also the same reference in A. Lukyn Williams, “The Tetragrammaton—Jahweh, Name or Surrogate?” *ZAW* 54 [1936], page 266, under 1). This truly remarkable comment, where Jerome directly states that the full four-letter form of the divine name can be pronounced as “Yaho,” fits perfectly with my theory that the four-letter form of the divine name is actually the pronunciation equivalent of the three-letter form of the name found in the Elephantine Papyri and represented in Greek by the form **Ιαω** (*Iao*).

⁶⁴ “Onomastica” are defined as “a division of a larger genre called glossae,” which were “Greek literary tools meant to explain words and expressions either no longer used in living language or foreign to the reader due to dialectical variation” (Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of **Ιαω**,” page 20). For example, P.Oxy 2745, published as an “Onomasticon of Hebrew Names” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 36 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1970), page 3, has *Iao* eight times in a column that provides “an etymological interpretation” of Old Testament Hebrew names translated into Greek. This portion of the papyrus is dated to the third century CE and it is likely the product of a Christian scribe since, in addition to the use of *Iao* throughout, the Greek word for “God” is contracted in column B, line 5, in what is known as a *nomen sacrum* (“sacred name”), which is believed to be a post-apostolic Christian invention that I will discuss later in this chapter in relation to the use of the divine name in the NT. Shaw’s study is an excellent presentation of the use of *Iao* and, in addition to P.Oxy 2745, he notes occurrences of *Iao* in the following onomastica: The Heidelberg Papyri, dated to the late third or early fourth century CE, which has

nine instances of *Iao* and two instances of *Iω* (*Io*, corresponding to the Hebrew י; see notes 37, 52, and 55 above; compare the reading of Vat. 174.81 [see Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," page 35, note 69, page 36, note 70, and page 38, note 82]). This papyrus roll, like P.Oxy 2745, contains an instance of the Greek word for "God" as a *nomen sacrum*. Further, it also incorporates a quotation of Matt 27:46 or Mark 15:34 and violates the alphabetical listing of words in favor of *Ιησους* ("Jesus"). These facts mark the papyrus as a Christian document (Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," page 22, note 8). Codex Marchalianus (Q) is a sixth century LXX manuscript that contains "onomastic notes in its marginalia" (Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," page 26). Twice in the notes for Eze 1:2 and 11:1 *Iao* is used. According to Shaw the use of *Iao* in these onomastica, which are based on the Greek names used in the LXX, probably indicates "an early time when *Iω* was being read and employed by Jews" (Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," page 27). We could also say this is true among early Christians based on the Christian character of some of these onomastica, in particular P.Oxy 2745 and the Heidelberg Papyri, as noted above. Shaw notes an additional instance of *Iao* in "another apparently old onomasticon" in the "marginalia of an uncial palimpsest of Genesis and Exodus from the Vatican collection of Pius II (Gr. 15), dated to the ninth century [Ralphs 662]," but the interpretations of which "date to the time or milieu of Origen due to certain agreements (one unique) between this onomasticon and name expositions given in Origen" (Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," page 32). Shaw also cites the Onomasticum Coislinianum of the sixth century CE, which is "comprehensive for the entire Bible," and it has "the most [ten] instances of *Iω* in the non-papyrological Greek onomastica." There is also the Onomastica Vaticana (dated prior to the sixth century CE) which contains some form of *Iao* in several instances, and the Glossae Colbertinae (dated to between the third and sixth centuries CE) which contains two instances of *Iao* (Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," pages 32-37). Several other onomastic sources, some as late as the fifteenth century (!), are also cited by Shaw ("The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," pages 37-38). Shaw also notes instances of *Iao* in other language onomastica, including six instances of *Iao* and two instances of *Ia* in the Syriac onomastica, which are mostly from the sixth or seventh centuries CE, but "clearly translated from Greek *Vorlagen* [= underlying texts] since they retain the order of the Greek, not the Syriac, alphabet in their listing of names" (Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of *Iω*," pages 39-41 [the quote is found on page 40 of his dissertation]). For the instances of the divine name in the Ethiopian onomastica, see note 69 below.

⁶⁵ In his *Commentary on John*, Origen (c. 185-c. 253 CE) explains the meaning of "Jeremiah" as μετεωρισμός *Iω* (*meteorismos Iao*, "Iao means 'lifting up'"). Compare the translation in ANF 10, page 322, Book II, second column ("IAO means etymologically lifting up, elation"). See also G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), page 865, under μετεωρισμός. The forms *Iao* and *Iaoia* also derive support from the possible readings of *Contra Celsus* 6.32, where Origen refers to those involved in the magical arts who took the name *Iao* or *Iaoia* "from the Hebrew scriptures," which is the "name used by the Hebrews" (ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν Ἑβραϊκῶν γραφῶν τὸν Ἰαῶα παρ' Ἑβραίοις ὀνομαζόμενον). See Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), page 349. The form *Iaoia* is listed in the main text of Paul Koetschau's *Origenes Werke*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899). Chadwick (*Origen: Contra Celsum*, page 349,

tradition of Clement of Alexandria.⁶⁶ Ια is represented by Origen, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Theodoret, and Epiphanius.⁶⁷

note 1) cites both *Iao* and *Iaioia* as Greek forms of the divine name used in this citation. Thus, both forms are listed in figure 1.1 as having been associated with the usage of the “Hebrews” in the ancient world. The form Ιαη (*Iae*) is found in Origen’s commentary on Psalm 2, as found in J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66), vol. 12, column 1104, which is translated in relevant part by Leslie John McGregor, *The Greek Text of Ezekiel: An Examination of Its Homogeneity* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1985), page 208, note 7, as follows:

Mention must be made of the word pronounced ‘Kurios’ by the Greeks and ‘Adonai’ by the Hebrews. God is given ten names by the Hebrews. One of these is ‘Adonai’ and is translated as ‘Lord’ [Kurios]. In some places it is pronounced ‘Adonai’ by the Hebrews and ‘Kurios’ by the Greeks, the form of what has been written in Scripture dictating this. When Iae [Ἰαῆ] is found, it is pronounced ‘Kurios’ by the Greeks, but not by the Hebrews, as in ‘Praise the Lord, for praise is good’ [LXX: Ps 146.1]. ‘Lord’ [Kurion] is said there instead of Iae [Ἰαῆ]. The beginning of the Psalm is ‘Allelouia’ according to the Hebrews.

Here the use of Ιαη (*Iae*) is clearly tied to the use of *Allelouia* in the Greek of Psalm 146:1, with *Iae* serving as “a transcription of *Yah*” (Roland de Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies*, John I. Durham and J.R. Porter, eds. [Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1970], page 52, note 16). This form (*Yah*) is also represented by the *-ia* in the Greek *Allelouia*. The Greek letter *eta* (η) appears to be an attempt to represent the Hebrew *heh* (ה) in *YaH*. This may have something to do with “the earliest forms of the Greek alphabet” where “η was a mark of aspiration” (Speiser, “The Pronunciation of Hebrew Based Chiefly on the Transliterations in the Hexapla: The Vowels,” page 24).

⁶⁶ In his work, *The Stromata* (ANF 2, Book 5, chap. 6, page 452), Clement (c. 150- c. 220 CE) writes concerning the temple and the name of God:

Again, there is the veil of the entrance into the holy of holies. Four pillars there are, the sign of the sacred tetrad of the ancient covenants. Further, the mystic name of four letters [τὸ τετράγραμμον] which was affixed to those alone to whom the adytum was accessible, is called Jave [Ἰαοὺ], which is interpreted, “Who is and shall be” [ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐσόμενος] The name of God, too, among the Greeks contains four letters [τετράδα περιέχει γραμμάτων].

The reading Ιαοὺ (*Iaou*) in figure 1.1 is based on J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66), vol. 9, column 60, which is supported by the eleventh century Greek Codex Laurentianus. Some editions of Clement’s *Stromata* read Ιαοῦε (*Iaoue*) instead of Ιαοὺ (*Iaou*) in the main text of Clement based on less than convincing evidence (see *Stromata* 5.6.34 in Alain Le Boulluec, ed., *Les Stromates*, Stromate V, Tome 1 [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1981] and in O. Stählin and L. Früchtel, eds., *Stromata I – VI* [Berlin, 1960]). But not only is the reading *Iaoue* textually uncertain but it also appears to contradict the comparison between the “four letters” of the divine name and the “four pillars” (κίονες τέτταρες) Clement refers to as “the sign of the sacred tetrad [τετράδος] of the ancient covenants,” since *Iaoue* has five letters whereas the form *Iaou* has four letters. *Iao* has three letters, but it could involve a fourth unwritten letter

Ιεω and Ιευ are found in the tradition of Herennius Philo of Byblos.⁶⁸ Ιαωθ is used by Irenaeus.⁶⁹ And the form Ιαηλ is from The Books of Adam and Eve.⁷⁰

if the final *heh* in Hebrew merely marks the final “o” vowel sound of the Hebrew *waw*. Or perhaps the final *heh* indicates a breathing out of the final “o” sound, which in Greek was not represented by a letter or by some other mark during this time. Thus, *Iao* could again represent a pronunciation of the full four-letter written Hebrew/Aramaic form of the divine name, the tetragrammaton (see note 63).

⁶⁷ Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), page 73, states that Aquila (early to middle second century CE) and Symmachus (middle to late second century CE) use *Ia* in their translations of Ps 67(68):5 and Isa 12:2. Further on the use of *Ia* by Aquila in Ps 67(68):5, in the possibly early fifth century CE work *Hypomnestikon Biblion Ioseppou* (or “Notebook of Josephus [or ‘Joseph’]”) we read that “Lord is his name” is rendered by Aquila as “Ia [Iα] is his name” (151:4 in Robert M. Grant and Glen W. Menzies, *Joseph’s Bible Notes [Hypomnestikon]*, Harold W. Attridge, ed. [Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996], page 331). Aquila also uses *Ia* twice in Isa 38:11. Theodotion (late second century or early third century CE) uses *Ia* in Ps 67(68):5, Isa 12:2, and twice in Isa 38:11. The fifth column of Origen’s Hexapla (produced between 230 and 240 CE) also uses *Ia* in Ps 67(68):5. According to the critical edition by Natalio Fernández Marcos and Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *Theodoreti Cyrensis Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (Madrid, 1979), page 112 (15.17-18), Theodoret (c. 393-c. 468) wrote, Καλοῦσι δὲ αὐτὸ σαμαρεῖται μὲν Ἰαβέ, ἰουδαῖοι δὲ Ἰα, which can be translated, “The Samaritans pronounce it [the divine name mentioned in 15.15] ‘Iabe’ [Iαβε], but the Jews pronounce it ‘Ia’ [Iα].” Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315-c. 403 CE) also lists *Ia* and *Iabe* (see *The Panarion* 1.3.40) among the names of God.

⁶⁸ This form of the divine name (*Ieuo*) is preserved in Eusebius of Caesarea’s (c. 260-c. 340 CE) *Preparation for the Gospel* 1.9.20-21, where Eusebius quotes Porphyry’s (c. 232-c. 305 CE) work *Against the Christians*, in which work Porphyry gives a translation into Greek by Philo of Byblos (c. 70-c. 160 CE) of Sanchuniathon of Berytus’ (believed to have lived in pre-Trojan times, anywhere from 2000 to 1300 BCE) history of the Jews. With respect to this history it is said that Sanchuniathon “received the records from Hierombalus the priest of the god Ieuo [Ἰευώ]” (E.H. Gifford’s translation of Eusebius’ *Preparation* as found in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2, page 139; see also George H. van Kooten, “Moses/Musaeus/Mochos and His God Yahweh, Iao, Sabaoth, Seen from a Graeco-Roman Perspective,” in *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, George H. van Kooten, ed. [Leiden: Brill, 2006], pages 119-120). However, the form *Ieuo* from this passage from Philo of Byblos is “changed into ‘Iao’ in Theodoretus of Cyrrhus in Syria (c. AD 393-466), *Graecarum affectionum curatio* 2.44” (van Kooten, “Moses/Musaeus/Mochos and His God,” page 120, note 32; see also Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2, page 140, note for 21, Ἰευώ). Indeed, elsewhere John Lydus (see note 62 above) references Varro’s use of the name *Iao* and says that Philo of Byblos defines this name “in the Phoenician language” (Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2, page 141, under 324; van Kooten, “Moses/Musaeus/Mochos and His God,” page 127). This “shows that Philo of Byblos

While forms of the divine name found in literature devoted to the use of magic are sometimes the same as some of the Greek forms of the divine name referenced in figure 1.1 above, novel or unusual Greek forms of the divine name found in magic texts are not listed in figure 1.1. This is because “these prayers and incantations in the magical papyri mix all sorts of sounds

“appears to have known the Jewish God not only as ‘Ieuo’ ... but also as ‘Iao’” (van Kooten, “Moses/Musaeus/Mochos and His God,” page 127). *Ieu* is listed in figure 1.1 above because of the reference to this form by Stern (*Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2, page 141, note for **21**, Ἰεϋώ) as occurring in codex A of this text’s manuscript history in place of *Ieuo* in the text of Eusebius translated by Gifford (quoted earlier in this note). See also William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1968), page 263, note 155, who cites these two variants (*Ieuo* and *Ieu*), as well as the reading *Iao* from Theodoret.

⁶⁹ Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 200 CE), in his work *Against Heresies* (ANF 1, pages 412-413), refers to the four-letter form of the “name of God ... among the Greeks” as Ιαωθ (*Iaoth*). Here Irenaeus also refers to different meanings for Greek forms of the divine name (each having four letters) but where the two referenced forms differ with respect to the pronunciation of the last syllable. The form “Jaωth” (given in Latin, but with a Greek omega [ω] and presumably an understood Greek *theta* [θ] at the end) is said to be “long and aspirated” while the form “Jaoth” (with a Greek *omicron* and a final *theta*) is said to be “written shortly.” Again, each of these forms of the divine name, in Greek, would have four letters: *iota*, *alpha*, *omega*, and *theta*, or *iota*, *alpha*, *omicron*, and *theta*. The Greek forms Ιαωθ and Ιαωτ (*Iaot*), both with an *omega*, are found in several Greek papyri (see G. Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988 (1901)], page 327), and also in a thirteenth century CE Ethiopian *onomasticon* (Frank Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra*, vol. 2 [Leipzig: J.C. Hinriches'sche Buchhandlung, 1915], pages 1004, 1005). Shaw notes that the form cited by Wutz as *Iao* is actually equivalent to Ιαηλ (*Iael*) in two manuscripts (α and γ) and Ιαα (*Iaa*) in one other (β), and that the presence of these forms, together with the form Ιαωθ in the Ethiopian *onomastica*, “likely shows that the influence of much earlier usage of Ιαω in Jewish *onomastica* had long range effects” (Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” pages 41, 42). But the fact that Irenaeus speaks of one form being “long and aspirated” and another form “written shortly” should be noted.

⁷⁰ *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., Second Revised Edition (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1999), page 72, verse 29:4, and page 79, verse 33:5. This work is believed to have been of Jewish origin and originally composed in Hebrew and then later translated into Greek, Latin, and other languages. The date of the original Hebrew composition is thought to have been between 100 BCE and 200 CE, with the Greek text having been produced “between that time and A.D. [CE] 400” (Johnson, “Life of Adam and Eve,” page 252; see also Wells, “The Books of Adam and Eve,” pages 126-127). As observed in the latter half of note 69 above, this form also appears in two manuscripts (α and γ) of an Ethiopian *onomasticon* (see Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” page 41).

together.”⁷¹ Therefore, such forms of the divine name are not always useful when it comes to isolating non-incantational Jewish, reportedly Jewish, or early Christian pronunciations of the name.⁷² For this reason, I have given little attention to the use of the name in such texts as it relates to this discussion.

Other Greek forms of the divine name associated with Jewish and Samaritan usage. The Greek forms used in reference to the Samaritan use of the divine name are also not listed in figure 1.1, because they are distinguished by the early writers who use them from the reported Jewish pronunciation. However, in addition to the five-letter Greek variant *Iaoue* discussed above from Clement of Alexandria (which reading is uncertain and does not fit well the context of Clement's remarks), it is the Greek forms representing the Samaritan pronunciation that are considered to be “the earliest concrete testimony to the pronunciation ‘Yahweh.’”⁷³ It is these forms and some other information concerning the Jewish use of the divine name that we will now consider.

As noted previously, the Greek form *Iaoue* in Clement of Alexandria's writings is a variant reading from one of his texts that seems to represent a Hebrew/Aramaic pronunciation such as “Ya/e-Ho/u-WeH.” But in spite of the textual and contextual problems this Greek form presents (as discussed in note 66), if we accept the form *Iaoue* as original to Clement then this form, unlike “Yahweh,” appears to ‘maintain the middle vowel’!⁷⁴ Therefore, though it may be possible that the *ou* in *Iaoue* represents the Hebrew *waw*, even this Greek variant form (*Iaoue*) does not necessarily support the pronunciation of “Yahweh,” because in “Yahweh” there is no middle vowel.

This brings us to the Samaritan forms of the divine name, namely, the Greek forms *Iabe* (Ιαβε) and *Iabai* (Ιαβαι) used in the works of Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315-c. 403 CE) and Theodoret

⁷¹ Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 415.

⁷² See Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, pages 321-336, for a good survey of Greek forms of the divine name including some from selections of the magical papyri.

⁷³ Sean M. McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1999), page 118.

⁷⁴ Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 416; Buchanan, “How God's Name Was Pronounced,” page 31.

of Cyrrhus (c. 393-c. 468).⁷⁵ However, as we can see from the quotation of Theodoret above (at the end of note 67), he does not use either of these forms for the *Jewish* pronunciation of the divine name. Rather, Theodoret uses *Iabe/Iabai* to represent the reported Samaritan pronunciation *in contrast to the reported Jewish pronunciation!*

The Greek form *Ia*, which Theodoret represented as being the Jewish pronunciation of the divine name, appears clearly to be a transliteration of the two-letter form of the divine name in Hebrew, namely, יָה (YH, “YaH,” or in English, “Jah”). As noted earlier, this form of the divine name stands alone in the Hebrew Bible at least 49 times and it is used frequently as a prefix and as a suffix in compound names in- and outside of the Bible. It is also used at least 9 times standing alone or as a part of the expression “Hallelujah” (Hebrew: הללויה [halelu and Yah]) in the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁷⁶ Further, this expression of praise for “Jah” is also found 4 times in the New Testament book of Revelation (19:1, 3, 4, 6; Greek: Ἀλληλουιά [allelou plus *Ia* (= transliteration of *Yah*, Anglicized today as “Jah”)]).

One of the variants listed for the Jewish use of *Ia* in the reference from Theodoret in note 67 above is the Greek word Ἀϊά (*Aia* [“A-i-a”]). This variant appears to be a Graecized form of the Hebrew word *’ehyeh* (“I will be”) found twice in Exodus 3:14. This form may have been represented elsewhere by some Jews in Theodoret’s time with the form Ιαβαι (*Iabai*).⁷⁷ It is possible, then, that the form *Iabe* comes from the Jewish use of *Iabai* for *Aia*, the Greek form of *’ehyeh*. Whether this is the origin of *Iabe* among the Samaritans or not (that is, it may derive ultimately from *’ehyeh* and *not* from a form of the divine name),

⁷⁵ Williams, “The Tetragrammaton—Jahweh, Name or Surrogate?” page 264, notes that Epiphanius lists not only *Iabe* as a name for God but also a variant reading of *Iaue*.

⁷⁶ Abegg, Jr., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance*, vol. 1, page 296. The divine name *Yah* (“Jah”) is used as part of the expression *halelu-yah* in the OT 24 times (Helmer Ringgren, “הלל HLL,” TDOT 3 [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], page 408, under “f”).

⁷⁷ Williams, “The Tetragrammaton—Jahweh, Name or Surrogate?” page 264, who states that “the Samaritans call it [the *Aia* of the Jews] *Iabai*” according to Theodoret’s *Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium*.

the form *Aia* also represents the name “Ahijah” in the LXX (Nehemiah 10:26 [2 Ezra 20:27]). Therefore, it is unlikely that *Aia* represents the divine name itself. It is more likely a Greek representation of the Hebrew word *'ehyeh* from Exodus 3:14, which Theodoret could easily have confused with *Iabe* or *Iabai* among Samaritans or among the Jews.

In any event, the textual tradition of Theodoret shows that he attributed the use of *Iabe* to the Samaritans, not to the Jews whom Theodoret says used either *Aia* or *Ia*. It is possible that *Iabe* (or *Iabai*) does not represent a pronunciation of the tetragrammaton at all, but rather the Samaritan pronunciation of *'ehyeh* which is put in contrast to the Jewish pronunciation of the same, which is, in Greek, *Aia*. But even if the Greek form *Iabe* attributed by Theodoret to the Samaritans does refer to their pronunciation of the divine name itself, this pronunciation is still in direct contrast to the reported Jewish usage and “may well represent speculation on the part of the Gentiles (Samaritans and Christians) as to the pronunciation of the name.”⁷⁸ Further, as Lowy points out:

It might be thought that the reports originating from the anti-heretical Patristic literature, on the Samaritans' enunciating the Tetragrammaton as *'Iαβε* [*Iabe*] or *'Iαβαι* [*Iabai*], must conclusively prove that this represents the real testimony of eye-witnesses. However, these reports are [quite possibly] nothing more than faulty transcriptions of incantatory formulae, derived from Samaritan magical texts.⁷⁹

Additionally, “the possibility that the bitter enemies of the Jews used the form Yahweh is no evidence that the Hebrews did likewise.”⁸⁰ Of course, it is possible that the Samaritans may have preserved a more ancient pronunciation of the divine name that the Jews left behind, but the truth is “there is no direct evidence from the late Second Temple period which supports such a

⁷⁸ Luckenbill, “The Pronunciation of the Name of the God of Israel,” page 282.

⁷⁹ S. Lowy, *The Principles of Samaritan Bible Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), page 273.

⁸⁰ MacLaurin, “YHWH: The Origin of the Tetragrammaton,” page 459.

pronunciation [as ‘Yahweh’].”⁸¹ But McDonough also states that the “virtual unanimity” among scholars for preferring “Yahweh” must ‘count for something.’⁸² Quite frankly, as we have seen throughout this discussion, there have been plenty of scholars who have rejected “Yahweh” and McDonough himself notes, as quoted above, the lack of any “direct evidence from the late Second Temple period.”

The majority of scholarly opinion is not what is at issue here. What is important are the best available reasons, whether they are provided by a scholar’s published analysis and investigation or not. If the majority of scholarly opinion is based on the best available evidence, then it should be accepted based on the best available evidence not on the majority opinion itself. If the best available evidence is our guide, then Bible translations would not continue using “Lord” or “God” in place of a form of the divine name, since the Bible gives us no good reasons for accepting such an opinion. Yet, the majority of scholarly opinion does *not* use God’s name, and so their opinion alone cannot be accepted without first considering, understanding, and then accepting the reasons given in support of a particular belief. Anything less is not acceptable in a biblical discussion about the use of God’s name.

When it comes to comparing the good reasons offered in support of one pronunciation of the divine name over another, “Yahweh” loses dramatically to forms such as *Iao* and *Ia*, ancient Greek pronunciations of the Hebrew forms “Yaho” and “Yah.” But McDonough proposes several related theories for different pronunciations of the divine name among the Jews and pagans that simply have no credible evidence whatsoever supporting them. Indeed, they fly directly into the face of a mountain of evidence that supports *Iao*, and to a lesser extent *Ia*. Amazingly, even though McDonough considers much of the available

⁸¹ McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, page 118. For additional discussion of the Samaritan pronunciation of the divine name, see my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002), pages 223-224, note 32.

⁸² McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, page 117.

evidence regarding the use of the name, the very theory he advances is against the evidence McDonough presents! He writes:

In sum, then, I would suggest that there were two streams of tradition with regards to the pronunciation of the divine name in Judaism. The “official version,” presumably passed along by the temple hierarchy and the rabbis, may well have been “Yahweh” (although this is not provable from the existing evidence), and was likely *not* Iao. At the same time, a more popular version of the name, Iao, flourished among some Jews, perhaps especially in the diaspora. Iao originated, it is true, from a shortened version of the tetragrammaton, but it eventually gained independent status as the designation for the Jewish God. This form was more widely dispersed among the pagans, since its adherents were less attentive to the traditions restricting the usage of the divine name.⁸³

McDonough represents a large segment of present and past scholars who simply cannot shake themselves loose from the pronunciation “Yahweh,” even when they at the same time acknowledge that this pronunciation of the divine name “is not provable from the existing evidence.” It is no wonder, then, that we cannot get many modern Bible translators or translation committees to put God’s name back in the text where it belongs, using a pronunciation based on the best available evidence.

Additionally, it is not necessarily true that *Iao* ‘originated from a shortened version of the tetragrammaton.’ It may have, that is, if we accept *Iao* as a Greek transliteration of the three-letter form of the divine name *YHW* (יהו) and if we believe that the three-letter form is not pronounced the same way as the four-letter form *YHWH* (יהוה). But this is not a necessary conclusion. In fact, when we consider “the existing evidence” and if we draw reasonable conclusions from it for an acceptable pronunciation of the divine name, this conclusion is not well-founded at all.

⁸³ McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, page 122.

Conclusions regarding the pronunciation of the divine name based on the best available evidence. I have tried to present and to consider the best available evidence from some of the best sources and from discussions of the available evidence, this so I can reach reasonable conclusions about how the divine name should be pronounced. Specifically, my investigation is part of an effort to determine if the most common English and other modern language pronunciations used by Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Christian Witnesses of Jah, and others (namely, “Jehovah,” “Jaho,” and “Jah”) are legitimate pronunciations of the biblical God’s name. I have also tried to answer questions related to the use of “Yahweh” in order to determine if it is an acceptable transliteration and pronunciation of God’s name which is based on the best (or even good) evidence.

In this discussion I have presented evidence showing that the divine name was represented in three Hebrew/Aramaic forms either standing alone or as part of other words. Those three forms are יה (YH), יהו (YHW), and the tetragrammaton יהוה (YHWH). Pronunciations of these forms prior to the Masoretic convention of vowel pointing are practically impossible to determine without considering their representations in other languages, such as in Greek. The Masoretic evidence itself is inconclusive, since it is not clear whether any of the vowel pointings in the Masoretic textual tradition represent an accurate pronunciation of the divine name. What is certain is that the precise vowel points from *’adonay* are not ever used with the divine name in the Bible. The vowel pointing that is used more often than any other (at least in B19) is *YeH-WaH*. It is not clear what word, if any, the vowel points used for this form of the divine name are from.

The Greek forms of the divine name give us more help than do the Masoretic vowel pointing of the divine name when it comes to determining what pronunciations of the divine name were in use in the ancient world. As presented in figure 1.1 and in the notes following it, while there are several Greek forms of the divine name that occur in various early texts, the form *Iao* (Ιαω) is found in one of the oldest and best representatives of the LXX Bible tradition, 4QLXXLev^b (from around the first century BCE).

Ιαω (*Iao*) is also found throughout representatives of early Greek biblical onomastica, and it is the name of the God whom the historian Diodorus Siculus (around 30 BCE) said is “invoked” by the Jews to whom the law of Moses was given. It is connected with the Roman scholar Varro’s (116-27 BCE) description of the Jewish God according to the “Chaldean mysteries,” and Tertullian (c. 160-c. 220 CE) refers to *Iao* as “found in the Scriptures.” Origen (c. 185-c. 253 CE) uses the name *Iao* in an onomastic context in his *Commentary on John*, and in another one of his works Origen refers to those involved in magical arts who took the name *Iao* (or *Iaoia*) “from the Hebrew scriptures,” which Origen says is the “name used by the Hebrews.”

There is one other reference to the divine name to be discussed here. Josephus refers to the inscription of the divine name on a “golden crown” worn by the high priest “on the seventh days and new moons, and if any festivals belonging to [the Jewish] nation, which [they] celebrate every year, happened.”⁸⁴ Josephus says that on this crown “were embossed the sacred letters, to wit, four vowels [*phônêenta tessara*].” What is most interesting about this reference is that Josephus speaks of “four vowels,” not four consonants or even just four letters.⁸⁵ The Greek word for “vowels” here is from the Greek word *phônê* (φωνή) which is used frequently in reference to vowels (with and without the article), usually in contrast to consonants.⁸⁶ But *phônê* and other forms of the same word can also refer to a

⁸⁴ *War of the Jews* 5.230 (Whiston’s translation); Thackeray LCL 3, page 273.

⁸⁵ For example, Clement of Alexandria (see above, note 66) refers to the written form the divine name as ‘containing four letters’ (τετραδά περιέχει γραμμάτων). This is apparently not specific to vowels or to consonants, but simply to ‘written characters’ (see Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, page 322, under γράμμα).

⁸⁶ For example, in Plato’s *Cratylus* 424c Socrates twice refers to “vowels” (*ta phônêenta ... phônêenta ... tôn phônêentôn*) as opposed to “the consonants or mutes” (*ta ... aphôna kai aphthonga*). In *Sophist* 253a we have another reference to “vowels” (*ta ... phônêenta*) in contrast to “other” letters of the alphabet. *Philebus* 18b discusses “the vowel sounds” (*ta phônêenta*) as distinct from “muteness” (*ta aphthonga*) and “semi-vowels” (*ta mesa*). Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1016b, 20, writes, “But the unit is not the same in all classes, for in one it is the quarter-tone, and in another the vowel or consonant” (*entha men gar diesis entha de to phônêen ê aphônnon*). In *Metaphysics* 1041b, 15 reference is again made to *phônêen kai aphônnon* (“vowel and consonant”). See also *Metaphysics* 1054a, 1; 1093a, 10; *Poetics* 1456b, 25 (twice); 1458a 1, 10, 15.

“noise” or to a “sound.”⁸⁷ If this is its meaning here in the reference from Josephus, then it could very well simply refer to the four “sounds” of the “sacred letters,” namely, “Yod He Waw He,” which Jerome (400 CE) in his “Commentary on Psalm 8” said “is the proper name of God and can be pronounced as Yahô” (see note 63 above).

This last comment by Jerome shows clearly that there was an early tradition in which the four-letter form of the divine name, “Yod He Waw He” (יהוה), “can be pronounced Yahô.” This fits perfectly with some of the observations that I have offered in this chapter, specifically, that the three-letter form of the divine name represents the same pronunciation as the four-letter, again, *Yaho* (English: “Jaho”). As I also discussed earlier, this means that the final letter of the four-letter form of the divine name found on the Moabite Stone and found elsewhere in- and outside of the Bible (that is, the final *heh* [ה]), likely marks further the long “o” sound that is also represented by the third letter of the divine name, the letter *waw* (ו). This would explain the use of the three-letter form of the divine name instead of the four-letter form in proper names in the Bible and in other early literature. It is also consistent with the use of the three-letter form of the divine name found in the Elephantine papyri and it is consistent with the ancient and most well-known Greek form of the divine name, Ιαω (*Iao*).⁸⁸

Personal names that include the three-letter form of the divine name do not correspond to a form that leads to a pronunciation of “Yahweh.” Rather, the best evidence supports pronunciations such as “Yaho”/“Yeho” or “Yahu”/“Yehu”⁸⁹ for the three-letter

⁸⁷ Plato, *Laws* 701a, uses it for those who became “noisy” (*phônênt' egenonto*). In Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.7.13, *phônênta* is used in reference to the “speech” of beasts.

⁸⁸ In addition to the evidence from the sources cited earlier, consider Deissmann’s observation that the Greek form *Iao* “became so familiar that it even underwent declension” (*Bible Studies*, page 324). As an example, he cites the form Ιαων from Pap. Lugd. J 382, iii.1.

⁸⁹ The Greek vowel α (*alpha*) is sometimes used to transliterate the Hebrew *sheva* (short “e” sound) as in זבולן (“Zebulun” [also זבולין and זבילין]) which in Greek is transliterated as Ζαβουλών. Other examples where the *sheva* is transliterated in proper names with the Greek *alpha* include Ἰαδιήλ for יְדִיעֵאל (“Jediael” [1Ch 7:6]) and Ἰαῖηλ for יְהִיֵּל (“Jehiel” [Ezra 10:26]). Therefore, the Greek form *Iao* could very

form of the divine name standing alone (as in the Aramaic papyri from Elephantine) or as part of other personal names in- and outside of the Bible. Whether combined with a final *heh* (the fourth letter of the tetragrammaton [יהוה]) or seen as the equivalent of the tetragrammaton in pronunciation without this fourth letter, the evidence associated with the three-letter form of the divine name in Hebrew, Aramaic, and in Greek (*Iao*) does not support the pronunciation “Yahweh.”

It is also possible that the final *heh* in the tetragrammaton could represent an aspirated sound that is additional to the “o” sound associated with the third letter (*waw*), which would result in a pronunciation along the lines of “Yaho-ah.” As noted earlier in this chapter where I presented the various Greek forms of the divine name in figure 1.1, the form Ιαωθ (*Iaoth*) is said by Irenaeus to be “long and aspirated” while the form Ιαωτ (*Iaot*) is “written [and therefore pronounced] shortly.”⁹⁰ It is possible, then, that the form *Iaoth* in Greek uses a Greek θ (*theta*) to mark final aspiration either in association with the final “o” sound of Ιαω (*Iao*), or to mark another common type of Semitic aspiration, concerning which Buchanan writes:

One of the variants in Dead Sea Scroll Hebrew often has a final aspirant, *ah*, which the Masoretic text lacks. For example the Hebrew for “he” and “she” according to the Masoretic text is HW’ and HY’ (*hû’* and *hî’*), but the Dead Sea Scrolls Hebrew has HW’H and HY’H (*hû’âh* and *hî’âh*). Also Masoretic words like LKM and LHM (*lâkem* and *lâhem*) have as their Dead Sea Scroll equivalents, LKM^H and LHM^H (*lâkemâh* and *lâhemâh*). It is possible that the Dead Sea scribes copied the texts as they were correctly pronounced in New Testament times, since Arabic spells its words the way the Masoretes did but pronounces them the way the Dead Sea Scroll scribes spelled them, with the unspelled aspirant at the end pronounced. For example the Arabic word for “he” is spelled

well represent the Hebrew/Aramaic pronunciation “Yeho.” To these examples can also be added the apparent representation of *’ehyeh* [יהי] from Ex 3:14 by the Greek Ἰαῖά (*Aia*), as discussed above.

⁹⁰ See note 69 above.

hû’, but pronounced, *hû’âh*. If this vocalization were applied to the Hebrew YHW, it might be pronounced, *Yahûwâh* or *Yahôwâh*.⁹¹

It is also possible that the pronunciation *Yaho* and *Iao*, from the respective Hebrew, Aramaic, and the most common Greek three-letter forms of the divine name (when standing alone or as part of other proper names), could be a shorter form of the longest form of the name represented by *YHWH* in Hebrew and in Aramaic, and by some Greek forms such as *Iaoth* (Ιαωθ). Based on other, longer forms of Semitic words with an aspirated final *heh* (some of which were noted above in the quote from Buchanan),⁹² the pronunciation of the divine name could have been something like *Yahowah*, *Yahuwah*, *Yehowah*, or *Yehuwah*. Perfectly acceptable pronunciations that are also based on the best available evidence are *Yaho*, *Yahu*, *Yeho*, or *Yehu*.

Indeed, the three-letter and four-letter forms may both represent one of these pronunciations, as argued above and as supported explicitly by Jerome.⁹³ Finally, *Yah* was and still is a perfectly acceptable stand-alone pronunciation of the divine name. In addition to being used as part of other names, *Yah* is also used in the expression, “Hallelujah.” In fact, *Yah* (Greek: *Ia*; English: “Jah”) is the least disputed of all of the forms of the divine name that have come down to us, that is, in terms of its form and pronunciation.

⁹¹ Buchanan, “Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls,” page 415. See also Buchanan, “How God’s Name Was Pronounced,” page 30; Buchanan, *The Consequences of the Covenant* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), Appendix I, page 317.

⁹² See also MacLaurin, “YHWH: The Origin of the Tetragrammaton,” page 458, who makes observations similar to Buchanan regarding the pronunciation of the Hebrew pronoun *hu* (meaning “he”) as *hu’ah* in “26 out of the 95 occurrences” in Qumran documents and in Arabic. Harris, “The Pronunciation of the Tetragram,” page 219, notes that “Ugaritic evidence also shows the pronoun *he* in about 1400 B.C. was *huwa*.”

⁹³ Compare also Williams, “The Tetragrammaton—Jahweh, Name or Surrogate?” page 267, who cites and agrees with F.C. Burkitt’s view that the final syllable with *heh* in the four-letter form of the divine name represents a “kind of honorific,” with the three-letter form (*YHW*) representing the pronunciation “YAHÖ,” and the four-letter form (*YHWH*) representing a similar pronunciation but one “lengthened and accented” as “YÄHÖH.”

In light of the above discussion, I propose that where there is any confusion or doubt over the pronunciation of the divine name, that those so confused do not use “Lord,” nor use “God” or even “Yahweh.” None of these have any significant, credible evidence supporting their use in the Bible for God’s name. Rather than keep people from using a form of the divine name that is based on what is actually in the Bible itself, and based on the best available reasons, we should use “Yah” or in English “Jah,” and thereby help others come to know the God of the Bible more personally. To help promote this recommendation, from here on and throughout the rest of this book, wherever possible, I will use “Jah” when referring to the biblical God. But what does this mean for “Jehovah,” the most popular English form of the divine name used by Jehovah’s Witnesses?

Should we only use those names whose ancient or original pronunciation is known to us? In his book about the beliefs and practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Evangelical scholar and apologist Ron Rhodes argues that his primary point of contention with Jehovah’s Witnesses is not the word “Jehovah” itself since, as Rhodes says, “Some evangelical Christians use the term as well.” Yet, in his discussion of the divine name he is quick to note that “the term Jehovah is not actually a biblical term” and that “there is no justification for the term Jehovah.”⁹⁴

As we discussed early in this chapter (see page 2, note 3, and page 4, note 6), Rhodes’ thinking is simply out of touch with how words in one language are represented in another language. “Jehovah” most certainly is a “biblical term,” no further removed from the Bible than is “Jesus” or “Jeremiah” or any other Anglicized name found in any Bible translation available today. In harmony with this, Francis Denio writes:

Jehovah misrepresents Yahweh no more than Jeremiah misrepresents Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah]. The settled connotations of Isaiah and Jeremiah forbid questioning their right. Usage has given them the connotations proper for designating the

⁹⁴ Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1993), pages 50-51.

personalities which these words represent. Much the same is true of Jehovah. It is not a barbarism. It has already many of the connotations needed for the proper name of the covenant God of Israel. There is no other word which can faintly compare with it. For centuries it has been gathering these connotations. No other word approaches this name in the fulness [*sic*] of associations required. The use of any other word falls so far short of the proper ideas that it is a serious blemish in a translation.⁹⁵

As Denio rightly observes, “Jehovah misrepresents Yahweh no more than Jeremiah misrepresents Yirmeyahu.” Does this mean that “Jeremiah” is not actually a “biblical term,” as Rhodes would have it? What about “Jesus,” the Anglicized form of the name of God’s Son used throughout Rhodes’ book but without any claim by Rhodes to the effect that, like “Jehovah,” “Jesus” is “not actually a biblical term”? In over twenty years of discussing this issue with Evangelicals, I have yet to find one who objects as strongly to the use of “Jesus” as he or she does to “Jehovah.” Yet, “Jesus” is no more original than “Jehovah,” “Jeremiah,” or any other Anglicized, biblical name. In spite of this, Evangelical scholars and others continue to misrepresent these and other facts concerning the pronunciation of God’s name and its Anglicized form, “Jehovah.”⁹⁶

The best available evidence points to Hebrew or Aramaic pronunciations of the divine name’s three forms as *Yah*, *Yaho*, or

⁹⁵ Francis B. Denio, “On the Use of the Word Jehovah in Translating the Old Testament,” *JBL* 46 (1927), pages 147-148. David Thomas, “A Further Note on *YHWH*,” *BT* 44.4 (October 1993), pages 444-445, similarly observes: “It is sometimes argued that the form *Jehovah* is a made-up composite form which bears little resemblance to *Yahweh*, the presumed Hebrew pronunciation. ... If we accept *Yitschak* = ‘Isaac’ without any problem, this appears to be ‘straining at a gnat.’”

⁹⁶ Another example of an Evangelical scholar who continues to misrepresent the issues surrounding God’s name by saying that it is “oftentimes badly mispronounced as Jehovah” is Dr. James R. White (*The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief* [Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany, 1998], page 197, note 1 to his Chapter Three). The reason why what he says is a misrepresentation is because White writes the above while at the same time making frequent use of “Jesus” and other Anglicized biblical names yet, like Rhodes, White makes no such similar comment about “Jesus” or other Anglicized forms of biblical names that are pronounced differently from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek Bible languages. One can only wonder just what Dr. White considers a ‘good pronunciation’ of any biblical name in light of his use of and remarks concerning Anglicized names!

Yahowah. All of these transliterations are properly represented in English by the Anglicized forms “Jah,” “Jaho” or “Jeho,” and “Jehovah.” The form “Jehovah” (or “Jahovah”) represents an Anglicization of the tetragrammaton with an accent on the final syllable (“Je-ho-VAH”). In English, such an accent and final aspiration does not carry over very easily into normal or regular speech because in English we usually do not breathe out or accent the final syllable of a proper name.

For example, in “Tina” or in the Anglicized “Jonah” (pronounced, TEE-nah and JO-nah, respectively) the accent is on the first syllable of each word. But originally the biblical name Anglicized as “Jonah” was likely pronounced with the accent on the final syllable, with aspiration or a “breathing out” of the last part of the name as, *Yo-NAH*. Similarly, in English “Jehovah” is usually accented on the middle syllable which changes the sound quality of the first syllable to “Jah” or even to “Juh” (“Ja[h]-HO-vah” or “Ju[h]-HO-vah”), though it is spelled “Jeh.” In the case of “Jah,” there is only one syllable and so without an accent falling on a second or a third syllable the “a” vowel sound remains; it does not change to “eh” or “uh.” In the case of an Anglicized form for *Yaho*, since it is not spoken often enough in English to have gained a commonly accepted, accented syllable, I propose that the accent fall on the final syllable with as much “breathing out” on the last syllable as is comfortable for an English speaker to give, namely, “Ja-HO(h).”

All of the above forms of the divine name are biblical words by means of their stand-alone usage or by their occurrence as part of other biblical proper names. When it comes to the pronunciation of these names, it is understood that names change through time and that as languages change often “only approximate equations can be obtained at best.”⁹⁷ The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and those Jehovah's Witnesses associated with it understand this:

⁹⁷ Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, “The Pronunciation of Hebrew Based Chiefly on the Transliterations in the Hexapla,” *JQR* 16 (1926), pages 346-347.

Most names change to some extent when transferred from one language to another. Jesus was born a Jew, and his name in Hebrew was perhaps pronounced *Yeshua*, but the inspired writers of the Christian Scriptures did not hesitate to use the Greek form of the name, *Iesous*. In most other languages the pronunciation is slightly different, but we freely use the form that is common in our tongue. The same is true of other Bible names. How, then, can we show proper respect for the One to whom the most important name of all belongs? Would it be by never speaking or writing his name because we do not know exactly how it was originally pronounced? Or, rather, would it be by using the pronunciation and spelling that are common in our language, while speaking well of its Owner and conducting ourselves as his worshipers in a manner that honors him?⁹⁸

The above provides good reasoning as to why the NWT uses “Jehovah” as an English representation for the form of the divine name that appears nearly 7,000 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, namely, the tetragrammaton. If others object to pronouncing the name of God because our modern vocalizations of that name are different from what may have been spoken or heard in ancient Israel, then we should rightly question the use of *all* names from the Hebrew and Greek Jewish and Christian Scriptures as they appear in their Anglicized forms today. As Speiser rightly observes:

[I]t is self-evident that no two corresponding sounds of any two languages are, strictly speaking, identical. This is primarily due to the important fact that both *the basis of articulation* for similar sounds, and the position of the organs of articulation when at rest, vary considerably in every language. ... When the layman says that so and so speaks English with a French or a German “accent,” he indicates quite unconsciously that all-important phonetic truth that similar sounds differ nevertheless in every language. Now if it is difficult to reproduce with accuracy the sounds of another language, much less precision must be expected from written representatives of foreign speech-sounds

⁹⁸ *Reasoning from the Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), page 196.

with symbols not adapted to such purposes [for example, when it comes to representing Semitic aspiration with ancient Greek symbols]. For all scripts are attempts to press a wide variety of sounds into the necessarily narrower range of conventional sound-symbols. That representation is, then, more or less imperfect from the very beginning. Besides, living languages are characterized by constant changes in the phonetic and morphological pattern of these symbols. Consequently, systems of writing which are of necessity stationary tend to become less faithful representatives of speech with every new linguistic development.⁹⁹

If a lack of true (original) pronunciation is all that is needed to justify removal of the divine name or a refusal to use it, then what should we do with “Jesus” and with other biblical names that are clearly *not* spoken according to their original pronunciation? In the New Testament Peter tells us, “There is not another name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must get saved” (Acts 4:12). Since there is no way we can be certain we are pronouncing the name here referenced *exactly* as it was pronounced in Hebrew or in Greek when Peter said what he said, should we then refrain from using or from pronouncing the name of God’s Son in any of our modern languages?¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Speiser, “The Pronunciation of Hebrew Based Chiefly on the Transliterations in the Hexapla,” pages 361-362.

¹⁰⁰ Questions specific to the pronunciation of ancient Greek are discussed in detail by Chrys C. Caragounis, “The Error of Erasmus and Un-Greek Pronunciations of Greek,” *FN* 8 (November, 1995), pages 151-185, who on page 154 states that the Erasmian system of pronunciation commonly taught in seminaries and in schools today is “nothing but a chaotic democracy of un-Greek pronunciations of Greek, each conceived according to what is deemed natural in the speaker’s own tongue.” Similar observations and a much more detailed discussion of the pronunciation of Greek is found in Caragounis’ *The Development of Greek and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), pages 339-396, where Caragounis relates that the “Erasmian” system first used by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1528 is actually the result of “a practical joke that was played on Erasmus by the Swiss scholar Henricus (Loritus of Glarus, hence) Glareanus ... Later, however, he found out the trick played on him, so he desisted from using the pronunciation he had concocted ... But the ‘news’ spread like wildfire, and after centuries of struggle with the traditional pronunciation, Erasmus’ error finally succeeded in ousting the Greek pronunciation of Greek and in establishing itself” (*The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, pages 341, 342).

Excuses for not using the name of the biblical God abound, but they are not convincing.¹⁰¹ “Jehovah” is an acceptable English form and pronunciation of the tetragrammaton (YHWH) and “Jah” (YH) is an appropriate representation of the two-letter form of the divine name used in- and outside of the Bible. The three-letter form of the name (YHW) must also be given consideration and in my view, based on the good reasons given above, it should be used more frequently in English than it is used today, in a form similar to if not in fact “Jaho.”

The good reasons supporting this form and pronunciation of God’s name include: 1) evidence of its use as a part of biblical and other ancient names, 2) its occurrence as a stand-alone name for God in ancient Semitic sources and in Greek transliterations (such as the form Ιαω [*Iao*], which form occurs regularly in ancient texts and in one of the best representatives of the Septuagint [4QLevLXX^b]), and 3) its acceptance by Jerome as, in fact, the way to pronounce the tetragrammaton itself.

But excuses not only exist today where the pronunciation of God’s name is concerned. They also exist when it comes to the use of God’s name in the Bible text itself. Not surprisingly, Jehovah’s Witnesses are often also at the center of this discussion. Therefore, I will now consider issues involving the use of the divine name in the Bible, in particular, issues having to do with the use of the divine name by Jehovah’s Witnesses in the NWT.

¹⁰¹ Another unconvincing excuse for not using God’s name is found in Dr. Robert Countess’ book *The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New Testament*, 2d ed. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), pages 26-27. Countess argues that because different vowel pointings of certain Hebrew words can result in distinct meanings, then we should not take chances with an uncertain vowel pointing of the Hebrew name of God. Countess then cites the Hebrew consonants ִתְּ, which with various pointings can mean “breast” or “demon” and he concludes, “If it be an impropriety to mispronounce someone’s name or to call a ‘breast’ a ‘demon,’ then how much more of an impropriety to vocalize incorrectly the name of the true God?” What Countess fails to notice is that there are no other Hebrew words with the same consonants as the tetragrammaton! Thus, no combination of vowels with the consonants of the divine name will, as far as anyone can tell, result in a blasphemous reference to God. Further, as we observed earlier in this chapter, it is clear from the Bible that God wants his people to use his name and for all nations of the earth to know it.

The Divine Name in the Text of the Bible

The use of the divine name during and after the Babylonian exile. At the beginning of the preceding section I noted that the name of God stands alone in the Hebrew Bible as a distinct word a total of 6,877 times: 6,828 times as a four-letter name (the tetragrammaton [יהוה]), and 49 times as a two-letter name (יה), pronounced, “Jah,” in English.¹⁰² The total number of occurrences of the divine name in the Bible is more than any other name or title in the entire OT.

In view of this, no one can rightly question the appearance of the divine name in the OT text. Why, then, do so few English (and other language) translations use anything other than the titles “Lord” or “God” (at times in all capitals) rather than a form of the divine name that is based on the best available evidence? If the divine name is actually in the text, why use titles that in no way represent the unique and more personal associations that are surely conveyed by the use of a distinct name for God?

While reasons have been given that range from money considerations (for example, Palmer and the NIV), to uncertainty over the name's exact pronunciation (which is true for just about every biblical name!), to attempts to keep the name of God from blasphemous associations (as if not using it at all is something approved by God [compare Isaiah 52:5-6; Jeremiah 23:27]), there simply are no good biblical reasons one can cite as credible support for not using a form of the name of God in translations of the OT.

Indeed, even author Lynn Lundquist, who can fairly be described as having launched and maintained a campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses' use of the tetragrammaton in the New Testament, writes that “God's name is used extensively in the Hebrew Scriptures” and “the textual evidence supporting its presence [in the Hebrew Scriptures] is beyond any doubt.”¹⁰³ Yet, though Lundquist takes issue with the use of “Jehovah” a few

¹⁰² There are also at least two reverse (Es 1:20; 5:13) and three regular acrostic (Es 5:4; 7:7; Ps 96:11) occurrences of the divine name in the OT.

¹⁰³ Lynn Lundquist, *The Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures*, Second Edition (Portland, OR: Word Resources, 1998), pages 8-9.

hundred times in the NT of the NWT on textual grounds, he does not anywhere present the same or even a similar extent of criticism against translators of modern Bibles who do not use the divine name in the OT where, again, Lundquist admits “its presence is beyond any doubt” in thousands of instances.¹⁰⁴

Similarly, even though Edwin Palmer admitted money, tradition, and uncertainty over pronunciation were the bases for the NIV’s non-use of the divine name, Palmer also wrote (see letter on page 8) that the NIV committee “should have used it.” It is this acknowledged realization that the divine name ‘should be used in the OT,’ combined with the lack of zeal shown by Lundquist, Palmer, and others in making this a reality that is so striking. This is particularly strange when you consider the efforts (especially by Lundquist) *against* using the divine name in the NT by those who do not use it where they admit that it ‘should be’ used (in the OT)!

There simply is no credible explanation for not using a form of the divine name when translating or when reading the OT. It should strike any fair-minded person that a decision not to use what is clearly expressed in the OT text thousands of times (that is, the name of God) might offend God by denying his name its rightful place in translations of his Word. What, though, about the occurrence of the divine name in the NT?

Earlier (pages 5-7) I discussed how after the Jews were released from Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE there is evidence that they began to use the divine name irregularly. For example, though the divine name was in fact used in copies of the Hebrew OT texts, as well as in at least some copies of the Greek OT¹⁰⁵, there were also certain Jewish groups and communities

¹⁰⁴ In 2003 Lundquist produced a CD through Word Resources, Inc. (Portland, OR) that contains 13 separate resources, most of which deal extensively with the divine name on some level relative to its use in NWT’s NT. But I am not aware of any effort by Lundquist to promote a campaign aimed at making sure Bible translators use the name of God in the Hebrew OT, which for anyone concerned about the integrity of the translated text should occupy a position equal to if not greater than the use of the name in the NT, especially when you consider the number of occurrences of the divine name in the OT and the certainty that exists relative to its use there. The issue with respect to the NT is not nearly as textually certain, as I will discuss further below.

¹⁰⁵ For example, 4QLevLXX^b contains the pronounced Greek form *Iao*. Concerning this form of the divine name, Shaw (“The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,”

that did in fact take a stand against certain uses of the name. Examples of their influence can be seen in 1QS (the so-called "Community Rule") 6.27-7.2, where we read: "Anyone who speaks aloud the M[ost] Holy Name of God, [whether in ...] or in cursing or as a blurt in time of trial or for any other reason, or while he is reading a book or praying, is to be expelled, never again to return to the Society of the *Yahad* [meaning 'unity']."¹⁰⁶

Additionally, several manuscripts from the Judean desert reveal practices concerning the use of the divine name which suggest certain communities of Jews were beginning to replace the divine name with titles and other surrogates. For example, George Howard cites several examples of biblical and Bible-related texts that make just such substitutions by using "Lord," "God," four dots, three *yods* (""), and other forms of substitution.¹⁰⁷ But references like 1QS 6.27-7.2 (quoted above) also show that the divine name was pronounced by some during the same time others were trying to prohibit its pronunciation, which is apparently why extreme measures were being taken to safeguard it against misuse.

However, references like 1QS 6.27-7.2 from the Dead Sea Community may only tell us what was true concerning this particular group's practice. There is not enough evidence to suggest that their view concerning the pronunciation of the divine name was commonplace in all Jewish communities at that time. In fact, if 1QS had such a great influence on the majority of the Jewish communities existing at that time, then it is significant that by the time of the writing of *Berakhot* 9.5 and *Sotah* 7.6 in the Mishnah (around 200 CE) use of the divine name had become *less* restrictive, permitting pronunciation of the name in public greetings and in the sanctuary.¹⁰⁸ Whatever the case, any attempt

page 190) writes: "Ιαω was ... a pronounced form of the divine name. It was *always* a vocalized appellation for the Jewish God" (emphasis original to Shaw).

¹⁰⁶ Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), page 135. See their discussion on pages 123-126 for a consideration of this particular group's influence.

¹⁰⁷ Howard, "The Tetragram and the New Testament," pages 66-70.

¹⁰⁸ Compare *Tosefta Yadaim*, where at the end of chapter 2 a group known as the "Morning-Bathers" complains about the Pharisees who "speak the Name in the

to prohibit the use or the pronunciation of the divine name, other than where it involves any misuse of the name, has no biblical support whatsoever. Shaw sums up nicely the picture resulting from the best available evidence concerning the use of the divine name during and after the Babylonian exile:

In sum then, we may conclude several things: first, many Jews must have ceased using any form of the divine name by the early-to-mid second temple period. ... Yet some circles of Jews must have used Ιαω [*Iao*] somewhat regularly for it to have wound up in 4QLXXLev^b and the onomastica, as well as for the pagan testimony to Jewish use to have come about. The name Ιαω must have continued in some use at least into the first century BC ... and, if the evidence from the pseudepigrapha and the Mishna is counted, likely beyond ... to the first or even second century AD ... Secondly, it seems that the name began to pick up supernatural connotations in the closing centuries BC and certainly by the early centuries AD ... Likely related to this is a third point, [namely], the specific form Ιαω starts to appear in mystical contexts: the earliest testimony is to its use among the Gnostics in the second century and beyond ... Fourthly, the Jewish God begins to appear nameless to pagans and early Christians. ... The passage from Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium* [353] is, in a sense, an excellent microcosm of the much larger historical picture. That is, near the middle of the first century AD we have the conflicting trends present: the practice of not using the name has become entrenched enough for Philo (and probably his party) to become offended at Gaius’ use of it, while on the other hand, the name was available enough for a Roman far removed from Judaism to learn its pronunciation, seemingly without much effort.¹⁰⁹

The above is a fair picture of the general use and non-use of the divine name during the period of and following the Babylonian exile. It shows that while there was no united position concerning

morning, before bathing,” and of the Pharisees’ complaint against the Morning-Bathers “who speak the Name, with a body containing defilement.” The Tosefta is a supplement to the oral laws of the Mishnah, and therefore compiled after 200 CE.

¹⁰⁹ Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” pages 199-201.

its use, the divine name was fairly well known among both Jews and pagans. It is not entirely clear whether the non-use of the divine name by any Jews prior to the first century CE was due to Hellenization or to the adoption by certain communities of other traditions that invalidated the OT's use of God's name (compare Matthew 15:6). But what is clear is the Bible's teaching concerning the divine name, which teaching was presented in part earlier in this chapter, on pages 10-21.

In the balance of this section I will explore and attempt to resolve questions relating to the use of the divine name in the NT. Of particular interest here is whether there is any evidence showing that Christians from the second century CE onward may have chosen not to use the divine name for reasons similar to those that were apparently behind the non-use of the name in certain Jewish communities during and/or after the Babylonian exile. These reasons include influence from pagan philosophy and/or an adoption of traditions that 'invalidate the OT word of God.'

The divine name in the Septuagint (LXX) and in the Greek OT manuscript tradition. The writers of the letters, accounts, and apocalyptic (Revelation) material in the NT had many holy writings available to them in Hebrew, in Aramaic, and in Greek texts of the OT. Historically, the first Greek version of the OT is believed to have consisted only of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, and it was likely "completed under Ptolemy II, in the closing days of 281 BCE."¹¹⁰ When NT writers quoted the OT they quoted either one or more of the Greek versions circulating during the first century CE, or they quoted from the Hebrew or Aramaic texts available to them. They could also have translated the Hebrew or Aramaic OT texts into Greek themselves.

All of the available manuscript evidence shows that when an NT writer quoted an OT Hebrew text that contained the divine name, then the NT writer had before him a text with a form of the

¹¹⁰ See Nina Collins, "281 BCE: The Year of the Translation of the Pentateuch into Greek under Ptolemy II," in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings. Papers Presented to the International Symposium on the Septuagint and its Relations to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Writings* (SBLSCS 33; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), pages 403-477 (the quote is from page 477).

divine name in it. There is no clear manuscript evidence for OT texts available during the first century CE that supports any other conclusion. The alternative, then, is to say that the NT writers adopted a tradition invalidating the Hebrew OT text’s use of the divine name by using a Hebrew or an Aramaic surrogate, or by translating the OT Hebrew text into Greek using a Greek surrogate, such as “Lord” (Greek: *kyrios*) or “God” (Greek: *theos*). Again, in support of this belief is little to no manuscript evidence available from this time.

By contrast, there are fragments of the LXX and related Greek versions dated to the time before or during the first century CE and they all contain some form of the divine name. Consider, for examples, the following four Greek OT fragments: 1) P. Fouad 266^b (Göttingen 848), which has been dated from the third to the first centuries BCE.¹¹¹ This papyrus contains the divine name in an ancient Hebrew/Aramaic script, יהוה. 2) The Scroll of the Minor Prophets (8HevXIIgr [Göttingen 943]), which is dated to between 50 BC and 50 CE,¹¹² contains the divine name written in two ancient (paleo-) Hebrew forms, יהוה (hand A) and יהוה (hand B). 3) As noted in our discussion above concerning the Greek forms of the divine name, there is a fragment of Leviticus from Qumran cave 4 (4QLXXLev^b [Göttingen 802]) that is dated to around the first century BCE.¹¹³ It contains the form Ιαω where the

¹¹¹ W.G. Waddell, “The Tetragrammaton in the LXX,” *JTS* 45 (1944), pages 159-161, dates it from the second or first century BCE. See also Howard, “The Oldest Greek Text of Deuteronomy,” *HUCA* 42 (1971), pages 125-131. Paul Kahle, “The Greek Bible and the Gospels,” *Studia Evangelica* (1959), page 614, dates it to about 100 BCE, as does Bruce Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pages 33-34. See an image of this text online here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/lxxjewpap/PFou848.jpg>.

¹¹² See Emanuel Tov, *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll From Nahal Hever* (8HevXIIgr) (DJD 8; Oxford: Oxford University Press, rep. 1995), pages 22-26, for a discussion of the dating of this scroll. Tov himself tentatively opts for a date in the later first century BCE. See Howard, “The Tetragram and the New Testament,” page 64, for other references to the dating of this scroll. See the image of “hand A” online here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/lxxjewpap/MPrsA.jpg>, and you can see an image of “hand B” here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/lxxjewpap/MPrsB.jpg>.

¹¹³ P.W. Skehan, “The Qumran Manuscripts and Textual Criticism,” *Volume du Congrès, Strasbourg 1956* (VTSup 4; Leiden: Brill, 1957), page 157. See the image of this text online here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/lxxjewpap/4QLevB.jpg>.

Hebrew text uses the four-letter tetragrammaton. 4) The final Greek OT fragment that falls within our timeline and that preserves a divine-name-containing text is P. Oxy 3522, which is dated to the early part of the first century CE.¹¹⁴ It contains Job 42:11-12 and it also uses an archaic Hebrew form of the divine name in the midst of a Greek text.¹¹⁵

In view of these four fragments of the Greek OT, it is no surprise to find that scholars such as George Howard have concluded: "We can now say with almost absolute certainty that the divine name, יהוה, was not rendered by κύριος ['Lord'] in the pre-Christian Greek Bible, as so often has been thought. Usually the Tetragram was written out in Aramaic or in paleo-Hebrew letters or was transliterated into Greek letters."¹¹⁶

In spite of the manuscript evidence to the contrary, Albert Pietersma has challenged the theory that the original Greek translation of the OT used the divine name. For example, Pietersma believes that in addition to not being an exemplar of the LXX (since the original LXX is believed to have been only a translation of the Pentateuch), 8HevXIIgr contains "hebraizing corrections" and for this reason Pietersma does not consider it a "*bona fide* exemplar of the LXX."¹¹⁷ Regarding P. Fouad 266^b, Pietersma

¹¹⁴ See *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 50 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1983), pages 1-3. Image: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rak/lxxjewpap/POxy3522.jpg>.

¹¹⁵ There are other Greek OT fragments that are dated to before the end of the first century CE. For example, the Greek OT manuscript P. Ryl Gk. 458 (Göttingen 957) published by C.H. Roberts, *Two Biblical Papyri in the John Rylands Library Manchester* (Manchester: Aberdeen University Press, 1936), page 24, is dated to the second century BCE, but it does not preserve enough of the text for us to know if the translator used a form of the divine name or a surrogate such as *kyrios* or *theos*. The same is true for 4QLXXDeut (4Q122 [Göttingen 819]), 7QLXXEx (Göttingen 805), P. Fouad 266^a, (Göttingen 942), P. Fouad 266^c, (Göttingen 847), and 4QLXXNum (4Q121 [Göttingen 803]), all of which either do not preserve a divine-name containing text or enough text for us to know whether the divine name was used. Images of these and of other early biblical and other texts can be viewed online at the following index, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/>. See also the Topical Index on the Elihu Books web site, under "D" and next to "Divine Name."

¹¹⁶ Howard, "The Tetragram and the New Testament," page 65.

¹¹⁷ Albert Pietersma, "Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original Septuagint," in *De Septuaginta. Studies in Honour of John William Wevers on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. A. Pietersma and C. Cox (Toronto: Benben Publications, 1984), pages 88-89.

believes that while textually “it is an excellent witness to the Old Greek of Deuteronomy, ... some revising of this text has obviously been done in order to bring it into better accord with the Hebrew,” and so it may not be a “*typical*” exemplar of the original LXX.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram,” page 89. On pages 90 and 91 Pietersma questions the originality of the tetragram in the LXX of De 31:27, since P. Fouad 266^b has יהוה TONΘEON (“Jehovah God”) while all other Greek OT manuscripts have simply “God.” But it is quite possible the LXX was translated from a Hebrew *Vorlage* that read “Jehovah God” (יהוה אלהים). Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (JSOTSup 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), page 42, writes: “Compared to the knowledge we have acquired through the Qumran finds that at such an early time no Hebrew text recension could claim to be the Bible text, we may conclude that the Septuagint version has its origin in one out of several Hebrew recensions.” If the original Hebrew text from which the LXX was translated read “Jehovah God” then the removal of the tetragram would have left only “God,” as we find in manuscripts other than P. Fouad 266^b. Rösel, “The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch,” pages 414-422, argues for a conclusion similar to that of Pietersma, but for equally unconvincing reasons that include alleged preferences by the original LXX translators for *kyrios* (“Lord”) without the article as an equivalent for the tetragrammaton, and *theos* (“God”) for the Hebrew word *’elohim* (“God”). In Rösel’s view there are certain contexts in the OT where the Hebrew text has the divine name but where in the Greek LXX tradition we find the substitutes “Lord” and “God” (which assumes these substitutions were made by the original LXX translators). Rösel believes these changes were made by the Greek translators in order to show an alleged distinction between the “Lord” (*kyrios*) who acts in a certain way, and “God” (*theos*) who acts in other ways. Thus, according to Rösel, through this distinction we “glimpse the translator’s theological thinking in his use of the names of God in the Greek Pentateuch” (Rösel, “The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch,” page 419). But such a usage, even if true for the original LXX translators, has no roots in the biblical (Hebrew OT) text that was translated, and so if what Rösel says is correct it would simply be another example (see discussion of Ex 3:14 near the end of this chapter) of the introduction of unbiblical traditions, in this case Hellenized thinking, into the text. But there is no reason why this kind of substitution could not have happened after the first “official” Greek translation of the OT, perhaps even during the centuries following the first century CE as a result from the tradition of Philo of Alexandria (who lived and who wrote during the first century CE). Indeed, it is in Philo’s writings that we find the interpretation of the “three men” in Gen 18:2 as “The One ... called Being [Greek: ὄν]” and “his two bodyguards on either side, one is God, the other Lord, the former being the symbol of the creative, the latter, of the royal virtue” (*De Deo* 1.4 [see also his explanation of the cherubim of Ex 25:22(21) in 1.5], as translated by Folker Siegert, “The Philonian Fragment *De Deo*: First English Translation,” in *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, vol. 10, David T. Runia, ed. [Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998], page 5.) Philo’s interpretation of the words “Lord” and “God” in this way is cited with approval by Isidore of Pelusium (c. 365-375-c. 435 CE), “He [Philo] declared that there were two powers of Him that is, of which the one, he says, is the creative and beneficent power

As for 4QLXXLev^b, after quoting Skehan's comments to the effect that this text strongly supports the belief that the use of some form of the divine name "goes back for some books at least to the beginnings of the Septuagint rendering," Pietersma acknowledges, "the genuinely Septuagintal credentials of 4QLXXLev^b are well-nigh impeccable."¹¹⁹

Returning to Pietersma's conclusions regarding the divine name in the original LXX, it is of interest to note that near the beginning of his article Pietersma quotes Howard's statement (quoted also on page 68 above) that the divine name was not rendered by "Lord" in the pre-Christian copies of the LXX. With reference to the implications this view would have on New Testament christology (that is, if the NT authors quoted LXX versions containing the divine name), Pietersma believes "the foundation on which [Howard's view] has been built, namely the ancient LXX, will not sustain it."¹²⁰ This shows clearly that Pietersma is concerned with the christological implications of Howard's study, and appears to be what has affected his judgment when it comes to the use of the divine name in the LXX.

Others have expressed concern about how Pietersma has handled this issue of the divine name in the original LXX. For example, Shaw observes that Pietersma "may, at least in places, be begging the question" by "taking as a given what he is supposed to be proving."¹²¹ Shaw also notes Pietersma's "failure to deal with the instances of Ιαω in 4QLXXLev^b" (which Pietersma is

and is called God (*theos*), the other is the royal and punitive power and is called Lord (*kyrios*)" (as translated by David Runia, "Philo of Alexandria in Five Letters of Isidore of Pelusium," in *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, vol. 3, David T. Runia, ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1991), page 301. Since there is no manuscript evidence showing any use of "Lord" or "God" as substitutes for the divine name in the LXX tradition during or prior to the end of the first century CE, there is presently no way for us to know for sure if the original LXX translators introduced a distinction between *kyrios* and *theos* in certain texts, such as those mentioned by Rösel or as interpreted by Philo. But whoever did make such a distinction, whether in the text itself or by their interpretation of it, the Bible does not support a substitution of the divine name with "Lord" or "God" and it does not present the understanding of "God" and "Lord" given to us here by Philo.

¹¹⁹ Pietersma, "Kyrios or Tetragram," page 91.

¹²⁰ Pietersma, "Kyrios or Tetragram," page 87.

¹²¹ Shaw, "The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω," page 158.

apparently “willing to write off as an oddity”¹²²), as well as a further difficulty with Pietersma’s thinking:

Furthermore, there appears to be a glitch in the proposed chronological scheme of Pietersma. He still must deal with all these MSS [manuscripts] that keep turning up with Hebrew tetragrams [and with Greek forms of the divine name, like Ιαω] in them, so he postulates, building on Skehan’s theory (even though he obviously rejects the initial part of it which has the LXX translators employing Ιαω for the tetragram), that this practice “began in *earnest* during the second century BC when Egypt became once again a place of refuge from troubled Palestine.” If indeed later books of the Hebrew Bible, i.e., those of the Prophets and Writings, were translated after the Torah was, then we seem to have a potential problem for Pietersma’s theory: weren’t at least some of these books first translated into Greek at or during this same period? If this custom began “in *earnest*” at this time, then was it going on earlier? Thus would not this practice of using the Hebrew form of the name within the Greek text, which he has characterized as Hebraization, be employed the first time round in translation in at least some of these post-Pentateuchal books? If so, Pietersma’s ideas have suffered another setback.¹²³

Whether the *original* (first) translation of the OT Pentateuch, Prophets, or Writings into Greek used a form of the divine name rather than surrogate titles (such as *kyrios* or *theos*) is not as significant here as is the question of what was used in the copies of the Greek OT that the NT writers actually used. After all, to support the belief that the NT writers used a form of the divine name in their quotations of the Hebrew or Greek versions of the OT, all that is necessary is to show is that the texts available for quotation by the NT writers contained the divine name. This is true even if “the MSS of the LXX that the NT writers quoted from were those that had undergone Hebraizing recension.”¹²⁴ That is, if in fact the divine-name-containing Greek OT manuscripts actually

¹²² Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” page 161.

¹²³ Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” pages 159-160.

¹²⁴ Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” page 167.

underwent such “Hebraizing recension” and are not simply representative of the original LXX when it comes to the use of the divine name.

It is not much of a stretch at all to claim (as I do) that the NT writers would more likely have quoted from a “Hebraized” Greek version of the OT if that version was known to be more faithful to the Hebrew OT text than any “official” or even “original” Greek translation. Again, there is no credible evidence to support the belief that the original LXX surrogated the divine name or that the four Greek OT fragments reviewed above show a departure from the original Greek OT translation by their use of the name. But even if we were to grant the assumption that revisions to the LXX included additions of the divine name to the Greek text where in the original LXX the name does not occur (perhaps in an effort to re-create a further harmony between the revised LXX texts and the Hebrew OT, which may have been lost in part by the first Greek translation of the OT), such ‘corrected’ LXX texts in no way support the argument that the NT authors preferred an original, but less accurate Greek OT text rather than corrected, more accurate Greek versions circulating during their time.

Indeed, Pietersma quotes Origen as saying, “In the more accurate exemplars [of the LXX] the (divine) name is written in Hebrew characters.”¹²⁵ Pietersma then states that this evidence proves nothing regarding the original LXX, since Origen knew that “among the Jews there were Greek texts which sported the tetragram in Hebrew characters—and he seized on this as original LXX.”¹²⁶ But Origen did not qualify his comments with “among the Jews.” He also does not appear to be discussing the *original* LXX at all but, rather, “the more *accurate* [τοῖς ἀκριβεστέροις]” copies! Certainly those copies of the LXX which contained the divine name are more accurate (= faithful to the Hebrew text) than those containing surrogates for the divine name, as Origen himself notes. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the NT writers quoted from “the more accurate” copies of the LXX, regardless of

¹²⁵ Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram,” page 87 (underlining added).

¹²⁶ Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram,” page 88.

whether such copies were the original LXX translation or a “Hebraized” revision of it.

Dr. Robert Countess, NWT, and Aquila’s and Other Greek OT versions. In his attempts to neutralize the evidence presented by the New World Bible Translation Committee (NWBTC) for the use of the divine name in the LXX, Robert Countess writes: “Among the manuscripts found in the Qumran region beginning in 1947 is the Leviticus Scroll Fragment 4QLXXLev^a. Dated as having been written around 100 B.C., it contains Leviticus 26:2-16 ... *This fragment produces the crux for the NWT contention* ... in neither [Leviticus 26:2 or 26:13] did [the divine name] appear. The copyist maintained his usage of the Greek language throughout.”¹²⁷

True, 4QLXXLev^a does not contain the divine name. But the NWBTC never declared anything to the contrary! 4QLXXLev^a does not even preserve a portion of the text where we would expect to find either a form of the divine name or a surrogate. The NWT gives a reference to 4QLXXLev^b (= parts of Leviticus chapters 2-5), *not* to 4QLXXLev^a, as an example of the LXX which (as discussed earlier) *does* contain the divine name in the form of the Greek word Ιαω. Dr. Countess is discussing the wrong manuscript.

The 1950 edition of the NWT (Foreword, page 12) contains a passing reference to Aquila’s Greek translation (produced around 130 CE) as an example of the persistence of the divine name in the Jews’ Greek Bible even after the first century CE. The 1984 NWT Reference Bible (Appendix 1C, page 1563) also makes reference to Aquila’s version. Regarding this, Countess writes that it would be quite risky to suggest that the presence of the divine name in Aquila “implies—even less proves—the same presence in the autographs of the LXX.” He also writes: “Aquila could not have compiled his version before ca. A.D. 130, many years after the compilation of all—or at least most—of the NT writings. Thus, NWT infers from a later work by extrapolation backwards that NT

¹²⁷ Countess, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New Testament*, page 30 (emphasis added). 4QLXXLev^a can be seen here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/4QLevA.jpg>.

writers *in fact* had a LXX with Hebraic entries for the tetragrammaton.”¹²⁸

Countess' criticism of the NWT's use of Aquila is unwarranted. NWBTC, in its Foreword to the first edition (1950) of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (the New Testament portion of NWT), was explicit regarding the evidence it was using, which did not include Aquila's Greek version as though it were either primary or conclusive evidence of what the original LXX had in it. Rather, they included a passing reference to Aquila's Greek version as merely a (minor) part of a body of evidence showing how some Jewish translators and copyists treated the Hebrew Bible's use of the divine name from the third century BCE until past the end of the first century CE.¹²⁹

There is other early manuscript evidence for the use of the divine name in Greek OT texts. But most of this evidence is either after the first century CE or it involves abbreviations or surrogates other than “Lord” or “God,” which abbreviations I will consider further later in this chapter. In addition to the Greek form יהוה (referenced in note 129) that was used as a transliteration of the doubled form of the divine name (יהוה [“Yah-Yah” or “Yeh-Yah”]), other forms or representations of the divine name are

¹²⁸ Countess, *The Jehovah's Witnesses' New Testament*, page 29.

¹²⁹ Norman Walker, “The Writing of the Divine Name in the Mishna,” VT 1 (1951), pages 309-310, believes that the double *yod* form of the divine name in the Mishnah is really “derived from the popular form of the Name in actual use, to wit, יה pointed in MT יָהּ [‘Yah’ or ‘Jah’].” Walker then argues that the practice of doubling a name in order to give emphasis produced the form יהוה , or ‘Yah-Yah,’ which we find in the Masoretic text of Isa 38:11 in Hezekiah's prayer (Walker, “The Writing of the Divine Name in the Mishna,” page 310). It is this doubled form that is also apparently represented by the Greek יהוה in the OT versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and the LXX of Origen's Hexapla according to the ninth century Ambrosian palimpsest (see Waddell, “The Tetragrammaton in the LXX,” pages 158-159). Walker believes that ‘Yah-Yah,’ which was eventually uttered as ‘Yeh-Yah’ (with the accent on the last syllable), was used from the fourth century BCE onward by Jews in place of the divine name (Walker, “The Writing of the Divine Name in the Mishna,” page 310; see also Walker, “The Writing of the Divine Name in Aquila and the Ben Asher Text,” VT 4 [1954], pages 103-104). However, Peter Katz, “ יהוה = JEJA, יהיה = JAJA?” VT 4 (1954), pages 428-429, believes that Aquila simply reproduced the divine name as it stood in the Hebrew text “with the single exception that he put a second י instead of י ,” which was “his way of excluding profanation.” It is impossible at this time to say for sure what the true intent was behind the use of such forms.

found in the OT Greek versions of Aquila (Ἰηοῦα and Ἰηοῦα) and Symmachus (Ἰηοῦα and Ἰηοῦα).¹³⁰ Finally, in P.Oxy. 1007 (P.Lond.Lit. 199 [Pap. 2047]), which is a fragment of the book of Genesis dated to the third century CE, we find an archaic *yod* that is doubled with a line through it (𐤀𐤀) in Genesis 2:8, 18, in place of the divine name.¹³¹

The doubled form “Yah-Yah” or “Yeh-Yah” may represent one way of speaking the divine name, since “Yah” is certainly one of the stand-alone forms of the divine name and it is used as a part of other proper names. But unless the double *yod* form of P.Oxy. vii. 1007 (also found in a non-archaic form [׃] in the Mishnah¹³²) represents a pronunciation similar to “Yah-Yah” or “Yeh-Yah” (such as ׃ [Ye-Ya]), such abbreviations are not in accordance with the biblical tradition of pronouncing God’s name. Indeed, they may in fact reflect an unbiblical “device of theologians in post-biblical times by which the utterance of the name of God was to be avoided.”¹³³ But such forms could also have been pronounced as “Yah-Yah” or “Yeh-Yah,” since even in the Mishnah (where such abbreviations are found) it is said that “a man should salute his fellow with [the use of] the Name [of

¹³⁰ Compare the testimony of Origen (*Commentary on John*, in ANF 10, page 371, first column) respecting these versions and the “proper names” in them (though not with any explicit mention of the divine name):

Thus we see that he who aims at a complete understanding of the Holy Scriptures must not neglect the careful examination of the proper names in it. In the matter of proper names Greek copies are often incorrect, and in the Gospels one might be misled by their authority. ... The same inaccuracy with regard to proper names is also to be observed in many passages of the law and the prophets, as we have been at pains to learn from the Hebrews, comparing our own copies with theirs which have the confirmation of the versions, never subjected to corruption, of Aquila and Theodotion and Symmachus.

¹³¹ See the NWT 1984 Reference Bible, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Brooklyn, NY), Appendix 1C, pages 1562-1563. An image of this text can be seen here, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/POxy1007t.JPG>.

¹³² Walker, “The Writing of the Divine Name in the Mishna,” pages 309-310.

¹³³ Obermann, “The Divine Name YHWH in the Light of Recent Discoveries,” page 304. Obermann (page 305) also observes that “nowhere is this word [YHWH] found employed as synonymous with those terms [‘God’ or ‘Lord’] in a grammatical sense, and hardly ever in a semantic sense.”

God].”—*Berakhot* 9.5; see also *Sotah* 7.6; compare note 108 above.

Evidence for the divine name in the NT. I turn now to the evidence for the use or non-use of the divine name in the NT. I have tried to show that there are good reasons for believing that during the time the NT was reportedly written (that is, before the end of the first century CE) all known Hebrew and Greek versions of the OT used a form of the divine name. We also can see from my discussion (see note 64) on the use of *Ιαω* that Greek onomastica (early Greek lexical tools) frequently use the divine name when explaining the meaning of words that contain the name as a theophoric element. Having the divine name as a “theophoric element” means that the name (or a part of it) is used in other proper names. However, it is also a fact that after the first century CE we begin to see copies of both the LXX and Greek onomastica that contain surrogates for the divine name, such as “Lord” (Greek: *kyrios*) and “God” (Greek: *theos*).

As shown earlier in this chapter, all known pre-first-century CE Greek OT texts that preserve a portion of the OT text where the Hebrew has the divine name, use a form of the divine name in the Greek OT text itself. However, later copies of the Greek OT such as the Chester Beatty Papyri (second to the fourth century CE), the Bodmer Papyrus XXIV (from the third century CE), Codex Vaticanus (fourth century CE), Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century CE), and other manuscripts associated with the later Jewish or Christian LXX tradition do not use any form of the divine name. In the Chester Beatty Papyri, for example, where the divine name occurs in the quoted Hebrew OT, the Greek NT has in its place contracted and specially marked forms of Greek surrogates, such as $\kappa\epsilon\varsigma$ for the Greek word *kyrios* (“Lord”).¹³⁴

These contracted, specially marked words are known as *nomina sacra* (“sacred names”). These special abbreviations are nowhere found in the LXX prior to the first century CE. But we

¹³⁴ Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 1992), page 183, shows a picture of Eze 16:57-17:1 from the Chester Beatty Papyri where the sacred abbreviations for “God” and for “Lord” can be clearly seen.

do find them in copies of Greek OT texts and in NT Greek texts *after* the first century CE, as I will discuss later in this section. What is interesting here is that there is still an inconsistent use of the divine name in Greek onomastica after the first century CE. For example, as explained above in note 65, Origen gives the meaning of “Jeremiah” as μετεωρισμός Ιαω (*meteorismos Iao*, “Iao means ‘lifting up’”). But in Origen’s “homily on Jeremiah” the name is defined by means of the Greek word *theos*, not according to the actual theophoric element in Jeremiah’s name which associates it with *Iao*.¹³⁵ Regarding the change in divine names in the onomastica, Shaw concludes:

In general, the name appears to have been more heavily used in the earliest Christian copies of those originally Jewish onomastica that contained this [*Iao*] trigram. Then in such onomastica it was gradually replaced by κύριος [*kyrios*], θεός [*theos*], and, curiously, ἀόρατος [*aoratos*, meaning, “unseen”], or compilers and scribes simply deleted any translation of a given name’s theophoric element. Of course, this should be expected since “the evolution of Christian praxis has always been away from Jewish practices, not towards them,” since Jews who used Ιαω in a non-mystical way had probably ceased doing so by the heyday of the Christian onomastica, and since there is meager evidence that Christians used this name to any substantial extent. It would, though perhaps not quite as readily as the Hebrew Yahweh, have become less and less intelligible to Christians as time passed.¹³⁶

Below I will offer a theory as to why Christians after the first century began to cease using the divine name and instead used sacred name abbreviations, and then eventually complete word substitutions for the divine name. But the primary question here has to do with what the NT writers themselves were likely to have used based on the best available evidence. The truth is, no one knows for sure what they used because all that we have today

¹³⁵ See Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” page 30, note 40, and page 43, note 110.

¹³⁶ Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” pages 42-44.

are copies of the original NT texts and those copies are far enough removed from the date of their original composition that they could have been changed (just like some onomastic and Greek OT manuscripts appear to have been changed) with respect to their use of the divine name.

Indeed, it appears that the oldest NT manuscripts to quote a divine-name-containing OT text, but with a surrogate for the divine name in the quotation, are P⁴⁶ (for example, 1 Corinthians 14:21) and P⁶⁶ (for example, John 1:23). These manuscripts have been dated anywhere from the late-first to the late-second or early-third centuries CE. So at the very least P⁴⁶ is approximately fifty years removed from the date of its original composition, and quite possibly even one hundred years or more removed. The same can be said of P⁶⁶.¹³⁷

Clearly, there is a considerable gap in time between the dates these documents (1 Corinthians and the Gospel of John) are believed to have been originally composed (middle to late first century CE, respectively) and the dates of these NT papyri. These are in fact the earliest copies of NT manuscripts that preserve a portion of the NT text that contains a quotation from the OT where in the OT the divine name occurs. There are some (such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christian Witnesses of Jah), who believe that during this "gap" the divine name was removed from the NT where it quoted the Greek or Hebrew OT text. The

¹³⁷ Young Kyu Kim, "Paleographical Dating of P⁴⁶ to the Later First Century," *Biblica* 69 (1988), pages 248-261, has dated P⁴⁶ to somewhere near the third quarter, or early to the middle of the fourth quarter of the first century CE. P⁴⁶ contains most of Paul's letters and the book of Hebrews. But Kim's dating of P⁴⁶ has been disputed. In *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, eds. Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 2001), pages 205-206, a list of manuscripts that date from the late first to the second half of the second century CE is provided which more closely correspond to P⁴⁶ than do those used by Kim in his dating of P⁴⁶. After then comparing P⁴⁶ with other manuscripts in the same Chester Beatty collection, the conclusion is reached that "P⁴⁶ belongs to an era after A.D. 81-96 (the era posited by Kim)—perhaps the middle of the second century" (*The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, page 106). A similar date is offered for P⁶⁶ (*The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, page 379). Both of these manuscripts are dated to around 200 CE by Kurt and Barbara Aland (see *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes, 2nd ed., Revised and Enlarged [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill, 1989], pages 57, 99, 100).

primary basis for this conclusion is the available manuscript evidence which shows that the OT text that would have been quoted by the NT writers contained a form of the divine name rather than surrogates like the sacred name abbreviations (*nomina sacra*).

There are others, however, such as Lundquist and Countess referenced earlier, who believe that the earliest NT copies we have show us just how the original NT document writers treated the divine name. If those who argue this way are correct, then the conclusion we must reach is that the NT writers, instead of quoting from the Hebrew or Greek OT texts before them, introduced a brand new way of representing the divine name (and possibly even other names or titles), but all without making any specific mention of this new practice. Further, in doing so the NT writers would had to have decided *not* to follow the use of the divine name in the Hebrew and Greek OT texts before them. I say this, because all available evidence before the second century CE shows that the OT texts available during that same time did in fact contain some form of the divine name.

Nomina sacra. The *nomina sacra* (Latin for “sacred names”) which have been mentioned already in this discussion are of special importance when we consider the use of the divine name in the NT. They are important not only in terms of what the original NT documents may have contained, but they are also important when it comes to answering questions about what should be used today when translating available Greek NT texts.

For example, if the original NT writers used *nomina sacra* then not one of the modern NT translations that I have seen is following this practice. In other words, if specially marked contractions such as $\kappa\varsigma$ for words like “Lord” (κύριος, *kyrios*) were used in place of God’s name when an OT text was quoted, or if the NT writer simply decided to use these abbreviations apart from any OT quote then, again, no modern NT translation is using the same or a similar kind of specially marked abbreviation like the NT writers allegedly did. But back to the primary question: Did the original NT writers *begin* the practice of using *nomina sacra*? If they did not begin this practice then who did, and why?

If the NT writers did not start this practice of using *nomina sacra*, then what did the NT writers use for the divine name when quoting an OT Hebrew or Greek text that contained the name? Larry Hurtado has provided some of the more recent discussion on the use of the *nomina sacra*.¹³⁸ After noting the unique features and use of the *nomina sacra* as compared to other Greek literary devices (unique even when compared to Jewish scribal practices concerning their treatment of the divine name), Hurtado believes there is a “counterpart” between these Jewish scribal practices and the *nomina sacra* used in Christian texts. But Hurtado believes that the Christian *nomina sacra* “are both different in form from any of the Jewish scribal devices and comparatively more consistent in form.”¹³⁹ Hurtado concludes:

[I]t seems to me that the best reading of the evidence is that the *nomina sacra* represent a Christian innovation. Granted, the practice was, in all likelihood, indebted in some sense to the varied ways that Jewish scribes tried to mark off the divine name ... but the particular scribal techniques differ. For instance, the Christian innovation appears to include the standardized use of the supralinear stroke to mark off the words treated as *nomina sacra*, and the characteristic use of contracted abbreviations of these words seems likewise to be a distinctively Christian scribal convention. Moreover, the evidence indicates that Ἰησοῦς [“Jesus”], Κυριος [“Lord”], Θεος [“God”], and Χριστος [“Christ”] were treated as *nomina sacra* much more consistently, and probably earlier, than any of the other words in question. Finally, there are reasons to suspect that the whole scribal tradition may have begun with a distinctive writing of Ἰησοῦς as IH, and that this first happened among Jewish Christians or Christians sufficiently acquainted with Jewish traditions to devise and appreciate the gematria involved in this way of writing Jesus’ name.

¹³⁸ See Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), pages 95-134; “The Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*: A Proposal,” *JBL* 117.4 (1998), pages 655-673.

¹³⁹ Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, page 105. See also pages 99-104.

“Gematria” involves “ascribing religious significance to the numerical value of alphabetic characters,”¹⁴⁰ such as we find in certain early Christian writings in relation to abbreviations of the name “Jesus,” or in the New Testament itself in places like Revelation 13:18 and 15:2 in regards to the “number of [the] name” of “the wild beast.”¹⁴¹ Whether the use of *nomina sacra* involves any use of gematria (which seems unlikely overall since no other sacred name abbreviation [except one for “Jesus”] appears to have any numerical significance) is not as significant as the fact that we have in the *nomina sacra* a unique scribal device apparently invented by Christian scribes. Further, the *nomina sacra* may relate directly to Jewish or to Jewish Christian treatment of the divine name *after* the NT was written.

This brings us back to the questions I asked at the beginning of this sub-section. First, were the NT writers the originators of such “sacred name” surrogates? In other words, did Peter, Paul, James, John, or Luke use ⲕϯ rather than the divine name? Since there is no evidence anywhere outside of Christian circles for the use of such an abbreviation, if the first writers of the NT did invent this convention then why is there no mention of such a novelty anywhere in their writings? Also, it is of interest that there does not appear to be anything in the Christian traditions following the first century CE that teaches or even suggests that the *nomina sacra* began first with the writings of the NT.

Since as we have seen it was not uncommon to use one or more forms of the divine name (in paleo-Hebrew, Aramaic, or in Greek) in OT Greek texts during and prior to the first century CE, then the NT writers would have had no reason for some

¹⁴⁰ Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, page 114.

¹⁴¹ For a more complete discussion of the significance of names and numbers in early Christianity, see François Bovon, “Names and Numbers in Early Christianity,” *NTS* 47 (2001), pages 267, 288. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, page 114, notes that in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (9.7-8) and in Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 6.278-280) reference is made to the number 318, which the LXX of Gen 14:14 represents by the Greek letters TIH. These writings see in this numerical representation the name of Jesus (IH = 18) and the cross (T = 300), represented by the 318 servants of Abraham. See also Bovon, “Names and Numbers in Early Christianity,” pages 281-282, for a discussion of this abbreviation of Jesus’ name relative to Abraham’s 318 servants.

special remark about continuing that practice. If the NT writers used the divine name then they would simply have been doing what was consistent with all Hebrew and Greek OT texts that are known to have been available during that same time. But if the NT writers invented a new way of representing the divine and/or other names (such as by means of the *nomina sacra*), then one might have expected some explanation or discussion of this new practice at some point within the first few decades of the writing of the NT. This is especially so if use of the *nomina sacra* was seen as something newly inspired by influence from the holy spirit, or by the tradition started and then handed down by the apostles (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Yet, there is no mention of this practice (use of *nomina sacra*) as having displaced use of God's name *first* in the writings of the NT.

The fact is no one knows for a certainty if the *nomina sacra* were invented by the NT writers. But there is no evidence that they adopted an existing Jewish practice and there is also no convincing evidence that they were used in the composition of the original NT documents. All that we have available to us today are copies of NT books and letters, the earliest of which are from the second, middle or late second,¹⁴² and third centuries CE. Further, we have testimony from early scholars like Jerome (c. 342-c. 420 CE) and Gennadius of Marseilles (who wrote during the late fifth century CE), namely, that at least one of the NT writings was originally composed in Hebrew and that the writer faithfully followed the Hebrew text rather than the Greek texts available to him:

Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesometimes publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Hebrew for

¹⁴² Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, Appendix 1, pages 217-224, has a useful chart of NT manuscripts, the earliest of which (P.Oxy. 4404 [P¹⁰⁴]) he dates to "CE2late" (= late second century CE [see his page 217, number 93.]). But the earliest manuscripts containing *nomina sacra* are from "CE2-3" (second or third centuries CE [see his numbers 94. (P⁶⁴) and 114. (P⁷⁵)]). Compare my discussion on pages 76-79 and in note 137 above regarding P⁴⁶ and P⁶⁶, the two oldest manuscripts that preserve an NT text *quoting* a divine-name-containing OT text but with a surrogate (*nomen sacrum*) for the divine name.

the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our Lord the Saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew.¹⁴³

Even if the first-century CE Greek translations of the OT did not have a form of the divine name (and all available manuscript evidences suggests that they did), the testimony above, namely, that when Matthew quotes “the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew,” suggests Matthew originally used the name found in the Hebrew text. If this testimony is accurate, then quotations in Matthew’s Gospel as found in Matthew 3:3, 4:4, 7, 10, 22:44, and 23:39 *must* have originally contained the divine name.¹⁴⁴

That is, of course, unless there is an OT Hebrew/Aramaic text that Matthew quoted which itself did not use God’s name. But if both the OT Hebrew and the OT Greek versions available to Matthew contained a form of the divine name, and if Matthew faithfully quoted from them, then according to all available OT texts dated to Matthew’s time he would have used the divine name when quoting the OT. It is not accurate to use later copies of the NT books and letters with what appear to be brand new scribal conventions (such as the *nomina sacra*) to answer the question about what the original NT writers *actually* used when quoting a Hebrew or a Greek OT text that contained a Hebrew (or

¹⁴³ Jerome and Gennadius, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, NPNF 3, chap. 3, page 362.

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of the Hebrew versions of Matthew’s Gospel available today, such as the versions of Jean du Tillet and Shem-Tob ben-Isaac ben Shaprut (referenced in the NWT and in the KIT as J¹ and J², respectively) see the Second Edition of my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), pages 36-43.

paleo-Hebrew), an Aramaic, or a Greek form of the divine name. This question, like the question involving the pronunciation of the divine name, should be answered based on the best available evidence, with beliefs subsequently formed around those reasons.

The best available evidence clearly does not favor use of the *nomina sacra*, and even if it did then no one today is following this tradition by making use of the same written convention. The best available evidence is the available OT texts that could have been used by the NT writers. This includes OT fragments like 4QLXXLev^b, 8HevXIIgr, P.Oxy. 3522, and P.Fouad 266^b, all of which contain forms of the divine name rather than specially marked abbreviations, or even complete word surrogates.

Those who believe that the NT writers did in fact use *nomina sacra* for the divine name that is found nearly 7,000 times in the OT must explain the significance of manuscripts like P.Oxy. vii. 1007 (discussed briefly on page 75), which contains a fragment of the book of Genesis dated to the third century CE. This fragment not only uses a *yod* doubled with a line through it (𐤅𐤅) for the divine name (compare note 129 above) in Genesis 2:8 and 18, but it also uses a sacred name abbreviation for the Greek word for “God”! Additionally, in P.Oxy. 2745 (see note 64), known as the “Onomasticon of Hebrew Names,” the divine name Ιαω (*Iao*) occurs eight times in this third century CE papyrus when explaining OT biblical Hebrew names translated into Greek. But, in addition to the use of *Iao* throughout, the Greek word for “God” (as in P.Oxy. vii. 1007) is contracted as a *nomen sacrum* (“sacred name”)!

These two texts show that even if the NT writers did use *nomina sacra* that would not necessarily mean that they did not also use some other representation for or form of the divine name. Because these types of conventions are used in these two texts, scholars have had a hard time deciding whether or not these manuscripts are Jewish or Christian. But there is no reason why they cannot be the product of Christian Jews who retained a

special significance for the divine name, and who also adopted newer conventions for other sacred words (*nomina sacra*).¹⁴⁵

No one knows the exact origin of these scribal conventions or the precise reasons why in some texts such as P.Oxy. vii. 1007 and P.Oxy. 2745 we find *different* representations for the divine name and for the *nomina sacra*. However, the best available evidence in the form of OT sources available for quotation by the NT writers strongly suggests that NT writers used the divine name that was found in such OT texts. It is true that in the oldest available NT documents *nomina sacra* are used, not a form of the divine name (except in Revelation 19 [see below]). But, again, the best available NT evidence in the form of such texts is at best fifty to one hundred years older than the date of the earliest NT documents (P⁴⁶ and P⁶⁶ [see page 78]).

The best available evidence, the evidence that I would use no matter what it suggested or contained, is the best of the older OT texts that could have served as the basis for the NT writers’ OT quotations. All such OT texts available today contain a form of the divine name, and it is best that we today use what that body of evidence tells us the NT writers most likely would have seen, read, and quoted: a form of the divine name.

Before moving on to the next section in which I will discuss the extent to which the divine name is used in the NWTNT, as well as the basis for its use according to the NWT Committee, it is good to ask and to answer the rest of the questions that I posed at the beginning of this sub-section: If the NT writers were not responsible for the use of *nomina sacra*, and if they in fact used a form of the divine name when they quoted from the OT, then who took it out of the NT? Related to this, it is good to also ask and answer why the divine name is not used in most OT Greek texts after the first century CE?

¹⁴⁵ Compare Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, page 122, note 82: “In the first and second centuries CE, we can certainly see Christian group identity emerging, but a significant number of people can still be identified as both ‘Christian’ and ‘Jewish,’ and they felt no need or desire to identify themselves *exclusively* as one or the other. So we should not be surprised that some manuscripts exhibit a mixture of features that more typically distinguish Jewish and/or Christian scribal practices.”

Greek philosophy and the removal of the divine name from Christian writings. We have already considered some of the evidence supporting the belief that the OT Greek scriptures and the NT writings prior to and during the first century CE used a Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek form of the divine name. Earlier in this chapter I also reviewed the OT biblical teaching concerning the use of God's name, which review showed clearly that there is no legitimate basis whatsoever for refusing to use a form of the name today. In fact, in the Bible God himself everywhere uses and encourages his people to use and to make known his distinct name. But if the OT and the NT writings in the first century CE used the divine name, then why is the name not used as often or even at all in Greek OT and NT texts during and after the middle or the late second century CE by Christians?

While certain manuscripts such as P.Oxy. vii. 1007 and P.Oxy. 2745 (both considered in the previous section) show signs of the divine name's continuance in biblical literature together with other literary conventions like the *nomina sacra*, these texts appear to be in the minority. The vast majority of NT and even OT Greek texts from the second and third centuries CE onward favor use of the *nomina sacra* or complete word surrogates for the divine name. But if the NT writers did not begin such substitution practices, why did this practice develop among Christians *after* the death of the apostles?

There are good reasons to believe that at some point those who claimed to be Christian altered their copies of the LXX by removing the divine name.¹⁴⁶ This is clear from a comparison of the manuscript evidence of what is undeniably pre-Christian Jewish fragments of the LXX (many of which were reviewed above) with later Christian manuscripts (such as Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Sinaiticus). If the Christians responsible for these LXX texts removed the divine name from the Greek OT

¹⁴⁶ Compare Siegel, "The Employment of Paleo-Hebrew Characters for the Divine Names," page 160, note 4, "It was the Christians who replaced the Tetragrammaton by *kyrios*, when the Divine name written in Hebrew letters was not understood any more." See also, Kahle, "The Greek Bible and the Gospels," pages 613-621.

which they considered to be inspired,¹⁴⁷ it is not hard to understand how they could have done the same thing to those documents that early in the first or second century CE may not have been considered inspired by many of these same people.

Even if the NT documents were accepted as inspired writings by *all* second and third century CE Christian LXX users, if the OT Greek Bible was subject to alteration when it came to the divine name then removal of the divine name from the NT should not be rejected out of hand based on any similar view that may have been shared concerning the NT. We should look at the manuscript evidence that shows how the divine name was treated in what was considered to be holy scripture (that is, the Hebrew and the Greek OT). Then we can evaluate the evidence for use of the divine name in similar or in other types of documents (like the NT) that were used and preserved by the same people or by those who lived after them. Lundquist, however, has a different view, “It does not matter that the Apostles read the Tetragrammaton in their copies of the *Septuagint*.” He further reasons:

It does not even matter that the inspired writers [of the NT] quoted Hebrew Scripture verses which used the divine name. All of these things are true and verifiable. *All that matters is the word which the Christian Greek Scripture authors actually wrote under inspiration of God.* All translators must faithfully represent the exact words written by the inspired authors. If the Greek Scripture writers used the Tetragrammaton, then the divine name must be used in each of those instances. If the Greek Scripture writers used *Kyrios*, then the passage must be translated *Lord*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ See Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint*, pages 68-94. Remarkably, Lundquist (*The Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures*, page 161) claims, “It does not matter that the Tetragrammaton in the *Septuagint* was changed during the second and third centuries C.E.” Of course, it does matter. It shows the tendency on the part of the Christians at that time to remove the divine name from biblical documents, even if the documents were believed to be the product of divine inspiration.

¹⁴⁸ Lundquist, *The Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures*, page 161. All emphasis in the above quote is original. Lundquist’s note at the end of the above quote emphasizes his point even further: “This is true even when the Hebrew Scriptures are clearly being quoted. The translator must reproduce for the English reader exactly that which the inspired author wrote.”

If Lundquist's view is correct, namely, that we should only translate what is in the *copies* that we have in our possession, the earliest of which is fifty to a hundred years or more removed from the original writing, then God or the inspired NT writers *did not follow this practice!* If Lundquist is truly intent on proving that God preserved his written word, and that we should do the same, then we should find Lundquist endorsing the Witnesses' view that the original NT documents *did* contain the divine name! Why? Again, because those who argue that the divine name was used in NT quotations of the OT are in a much better position to claim that God preserved his Word and that the NT writers 'faithfully represented the exact words written by the inspired [OT] authors', which is what Lundquist believes.

Those who claim as Lundquist does, namely, that the NT writers did not preserve God's name when quoting divine-name-containing OT texts, are arguing *against* the view that NT writers 'faithfully represented the exact words written by the inspired [OT] authors.' Lundquist, therefore, ends up in an argument not only with Jehovah's Witnesses, but also with himself, with the NT writers, and with even with God about the extent to which he would preserve his Word. That is why we find Lundquist making claims like (as quoted earlier) the "God who inspired Scripture will certainly take the necessary precautions to preserve it." Again, such a view is incompatible with Lundquist's own view that God chose to use *kyrios* in NT quotations of documents (the OT) that God is believed to have inspired. Lundquist's position regarding the use of the divine name in the NT suggests that God *did* fail to preserve what was actually written in his OT Hebrew word.

At the very least, the position adopted by Lundquist and others concerning the use of the divine name in the NT forces them to also conclude that the authors of the NT documents chose not to preserve the actual name of God from the inspired OT text in many instances. If Lundquist and others are going to suggest that God did not preserve his name from the OT to the NT, then why should we believe them when they state that God would "take the necessary precautions to preserve" what he had written in the NT? The pattern of God's acts shows that he will give us his name, and

allow others to decide whether to use it or to conceal it. In the end, the result will be the same:

Psalm 102:15-18, 21-22 (NWT)

And the nations will fear the name of Jehovah,
 And all the kings of the earth your glory.
 For Jehovah will certainly build up Zion;
 He must appear in his glory.
 He will certainly turn to the prayer of those stripped [of everything],
 And not despise their prayer.
 This is written for the future generation;
 And the people that is to be created will praise Jah.
 For the name of Jehovah to be declared in Zion
 And his praise in Jerusalem,
 When the peoples are collected all together,
 And the kingdoms to serve Jehovah.

Lundquist’s reasoning is flawed and he does not even appear to realize that ‘faithfully representing the exact words written by the inspired authors’ is what is in dispute. Lundquist thus begs the question when he claims that what we have in later copies of the NT, copies that have come to us complete with what appear to be novel scribal conventions (*nomina sacra*), are what “the Christian Greek Scripture authors actually wrote under inspiration of God” (from my quote of Lundquist on page 87). The manuscript evidence from before, during, and after the first century CE suggests that God allowed people to make decisions respecting what was written in the OT and in the NT, but he preserved enough evidence for us to make decisions about what he wants us to know respecting our use of and our love for his name.

There is good manuscript and other evidence supporting the belief that the divine name was removed from OT Greek texts and from the original NT documents. But there are also explicit statements and teachings from Christian authors of the second, third, and following centuries CE that tells us *why* some of these Christians chose to remove or conceal the unique name of God found in the OT. For example, the Greek apologist Justin Martyr (who died about 165 CE) taught that “Father,” “God,” “Creator,”

and “Lord” “are not names” (Greek: οὐκ ὀνόματά ἐστιν) “but appellations derived from His good deeds and functions.” Though Justin accepts the name “Jesus, as man and Saviour” as having significance,¹⁴⁹ he claims that “there is no name given” to the “Father of all, who is unbegotten” (Greek: Ὀνομα δὲ τῷ πάντων Πατρὶ θετὸν, ἀγεννήτῳ ὄντι, οὐκ ἔστιν).¹⁵⁰ Why does Justin assert that “there is no name given” to the Father when there is in fact a distinct name for God that occurs throughout the Hebrew and the Greek OT thousands of times? Justin explains, “For by whatever name He be called He has as His elder the person who gives Him the name.”¹⁵¹

Further, in his “Hortatory Address to the Greeks” (which may or may not be the actual work of Justin Martyr) Justin is said to have taught that “God cannot be called by any proper name, for names are given to mark out and distinguish their subject-matters, because these are many and diverse; but neither did any one exist before God who could give Him a name, nor did He Himself think it right to name Himself, seeing that He is one and unique.”¹⁵² It is clear, then, that Justin had unbiblical motivations for not using or even recognizing a distinct name for God, in spite of the fact that the Hebrew Bible makes frequent use of a name that God did in fact give to himself.—Exodus 6:3; Isaiah 42:8.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ ANF 1, page 190 (chap. 6 of Justin’s *Second Apology*).

¹⁵⁰ All of these quotations are from chap. 6 of Justin’s *Second Apology*, as translated in ANF 1, page 190. The Greek text for Justin that I am using is that of J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66), vol. 6.

¹⁵¹ ANF 1, page 190 (Greek: Ὡ γὰρ ἂν καὶ ὀνόματι προσαγορεύηται, πρεσβύτερον ἔχει τὸν θέμενον τὸ ὄνομα).

¹⁵² ANF 1, page 281 (with underlining). Regardless of whether these are truly Justin’s words, they further reveal that unbiblical concepts were tied to the use of God’s name after the first century CE. Indeed, in this reference it is said that to give God a name is tantamount to a compromise of his ‘uniqueness.’ But that is precisely what having a distinct name is meant to highlight: God’s uniqueness! This quote also suggests that God did not name himself, for someone would had to have preexisted him in order to “give Him a name.” Again, the motive for not using God’s name here is clearly expressed, and it is unbiblical. Compare also Justin’s reference to God as “a God who is called by no proper name” (*First Apology*, ANF 1, page 165, chap. 10).

¹⁵³ However, Justin may have taught a baptismal rite “learned from the apostles” where “there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again ... the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe ... calling him by this name alone.” But then Justin goes on to say, “For no one can utter the name of the ineffable God, and if any

Earlier in this chapter (see note 66) I showed how Clement of Alexandria knew the divine name. Of course, knowing the name is one thing and using it is quite another. With evident influence from and an expressed interest in Plato, Clement refers to Moses’ encounter with God in a cloud of darkness (compare Exodus 19:9) and to Paul’s statements in 2 Corinthians 12:4 and in Romans 11:33 as support of his view, in harmony with “the truth-loving Plato,” that God is “beyond expression by words.”¹⁵⁴ Clement even goes so far as to say that “the truly mystic word, respecting the unbegotten and His powers, ought to be concealed.”¹⁵⁵

It is reasonable to believe that this “mystic word” is the same “mystic name of four letters” that Clement referred to earlier in his *Stromata*, quoted above in my note 66. In spite of his expressed knowledge of the “mystic name of four letters,” Clement leaves no room for doubt regarding his full appreciation for any name of God, saying that the Father of the universe “is without form and name” and that any name we might give Him is not ‘proper.’¹⁵⁶ Names are only given to God, according to Clement, so that we do not “err in other respects.”¹⁵⁷ But Clement then gives a reason similar to that of Justin (and to the author of the “Hortatory Address to the Greeks” [if it be someone other than Justin]) for not recognizing a true name for God, “Everything, then, which falls under a name, is originated, whether they will or not.”¹⁵⁸ Clement unabashedly admits, “I do not say His name”¹⁵⁹ and, again, he also explicitly taught that the name “ought to be concealed.”

Greek Christian writers like Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, as well as Greek Jews like Philo of Alexandria who lived and wrote during or after the first century CE, were clearly

one dares to say that there is a name, he raves with a hopeless madness” (ANF 1, *The First Apology of Justin*, chap. 61, page 183). So it would appear that Justin did believe “the name of God the Father” which “no one can utter” was “pronounced over him who chooses to be born again” for a special “illumination,” but which was then (apparently) never uttered again.

¹⁵⁴ ANF 2, Book 5, chap. 12, page 463.

¹⁵⁵ ANF 2, Book 5, chap. 12, page 463 (underlining added).

¹⁵⁶ ANF 2, Book 5, chap. 12, page 464.

¹⁵⁷ ANF 2, Book 5, chap. 12, page 464.

¹⁵⁸ ANF 2, Book 5, chap. 12, page 464.

¹⁵⁹ ANF 2, Book 6, chap. 18, page 519.

influenced by their Hellenistic environment. This environment included the popular beliefs of Plato and other Greek philosophers, and the writings of those who were influenced by them. For example, Philo of Alexandria (who lived and who wrote during the first century CE) taught that “God indeed needs no name,” though he did recognize “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (spoken of in Exodus 3:15) as a name in which humankind “might be able to take refuge in prayers and supplications and not be deprived of comforting hopes.”¹⁶⁰ But Philo believes “it is a logical consequence that no personal name even can be properly assigned to the truly Existent.” In explaining the words of the angel in Genesis 32:29, Philo claims that the angel refused to tell Jacob his name because names are “symbols which indicate created beings,” which symbols we should not look for “in the case of imperishable natures.”¹⁶¹

Whether Philo's Greek biblical text contained a form of the divine name, as appears to be true for all LXX manuscripts available during Philo's time, is not clear.¹⁶² What is clear is that regardless of what name may have been used in the Greek or in the Hebrew OT available to Philo, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and the writers of the other early Christian works referenced above, all of them give the same unbiblical excuses for not using the name of God: ‘what is named came into being’ or simply ‘God is unnamable.’ In this, they all contradict what the

¹⁶⁰ Philo, *On Abraham* 51 (LCL 6, page 31).

¹⁶¹ *On the Change of Names*, 11, 14 (LCL 5, pages 147, 151). In *De Deo* 1.4 Philo also writes, “For he [God] is unnamable” (see Siegert, “The Philonian Fragment *De Deo*,” page 5). See also my note 118, pages 69-70.

¹⁶² However, James Royse, “Philo, ΚΥΡΙΟΣ, and the Tetragrammaton,” in *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, vol. 3, David T. Runia, ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1991), pages 179-183, argues that “the manuscript evidence very strongly indicates that Philo must have read the Biblical texts with the Tetragrammaton written in paleo-Hebrew or Aramaic letters, and not translated by κύριος [Lord].” Royse points to, among other things, Philo's statements in *On Moses* 2.114-115 and 2.132 which suggest that Philo's knowledge that the tetragrammaton has four letters came from a biblical text, namely, his own Greek version which may have used a form of the divine name with four letters. See also my discussion of Philo, the LXX, and the divine name in my more recent article, “‘Christian’ Witnesses of Jah, Jaho(h)-ah God” (April 2, 2011), on the Elihu Books Blog *Watching the Ministry*.

Hebrew OT and all known Greek LXX manuscripts prior to the first CE teach us about God’s name.

Philo, Justin, Clement, and other early Christian writers were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, even to the point where they attempted to “derive Greek physics and philosophy from the Bible.”¹⁶³ Caution should be used, therefore, when considering such writings. Indeed, though many early Christian and Jewish writers and philosophers of the first and following centuries CE knew of the divine name, and some, such as Philo, may even have had it in their Bible texts, they held to and expressed in their writings philosophical notions that clearly run contrary to what the Bible teaches. It is also possible this same type of thinking motivated others in the early centuries CE to use substitutes for the divine name in their writings.¹⁶⁴

Further on this point, there is evidence even in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354 CE to 430 CE) that Christians had by this time, in some measure, adopted an unbiblical understanding of certain Bible texts concerning the name and the nature of God directly from the writings of Philo. Augustine wrote the following paraphrase of Exodus 3:14 and 15:

‘First tell them [i.e. your people] that I am he who is, so that they may learn the distinction between being and non-being, and also be taught that no name at all properly describes me ... But if through their natural weakness they seek a *title*, reveal to them not only this, that I am God, but also that I am the God of the three men whose names express their excellence, God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob (*Mos.* 1.75-76).’¹⁶⁵

Philo’s teaching is not only unbiblical in that his paraphrase of the biblical account is not an accurate representation of what

¹⁶³ N.A. Dahl and Alan F. Segal, “Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God,” *JSJ* 9 (1978), page 5.

¹⁶⁴ See note 118 in this chapter for more on this point.

¹⁶⁵ As translated in David T. Runia, “Philo of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Thought,” in *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, vol. 7, David T. Runia, ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995), page 146 (underlining added).

Exodus 3:14 and 15 teach, but Philo even *adds* words to God's response to Moses' request for his name (as recorded in Exodus 3:13-15), namely, "There is no name whatever that can properly be assigned to me, who am the only being to whom existence belongs."¹⁶⁶ God did not say this, at least not according to any biblical text we have available today. Again, Philo added these words to the account and he taught that it was wrong to give God a name, a belief that was then adopted by post-biblical Christians. Finally, in addition to what I presented earlier Philo also wrote explicitly that we need to have "some substitute for the divine name, so that they may approach if not the fact at least the name of supreme excellence and be brought into relation with it."¹⁶⁷

Therefore, there are good reasons for believing that many early Jewish and Christian writers taught "there is no name whatever that can properly be assigned" to God, though this was in complete defiance of the words of the very same God whom these writers claim to quote and to reference.¹⁶⁸ Further, there is

¹⁶⁶ *On the Life of Moses*, 1.14.75 (underlining added).

¹⁶⁷ *On the Change of Names*, 13 (underlining added).

¹⁶⁸ Consider also the statement by Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* 2.275-276) who, after referencing this same account in Exodus involving the revelation of God's name to Moses, writes that he is "forbidden to speak" God's name. But, again, the Bible nowhere 'forbids' Josephus to speak the divine name. Consider, too, the statement by Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389 CE) in his *Orations* (30.17) as translated in F.W. Norris, "The Tetragrammaton in Gregory Nazianzen (Or. 30.17)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989), page 339:

The divinity is not designated by its name. And this not only the arguments [above] demonstrate but also the wise and ancient Hebrews used special characters to venerate the divine and did not allow that the name of anything inferior to God should be written with the same letters as that of "God," on the ground that the divine should not have even this in common with our things.

There does not appear to be any reason for Norris to put "God" in quotes as if Gregory is here referring at all to the letters for the word "God," and Norris himself does not appear to conclude that this is the case. Rather, he writes that the use of "special characters" here "involves the use of paleo-Hebrew characters in the Hebrew text." Yet, Gregory himself uses a Greek OT text that omits such "special characters," for shortly after making the above comments he writes, "Lord, which is also called a name of God," citing Amos 9:6 in his version of the LXX, "I am the Lord Thy God, He says, that is My name; and, The Lord is His name" (30.18, as translated in NPNF 7, page 316). The latter half of the note (δ) in NPNF relative to these comments by Gregory is correct, namely, that "in the passages quoted [Amos 9:6], had the original language been used, the Four-Lettered Name would have appeared." Or it may also have

no evidence that any of these positions regarding the use of God’s name had anything to do with any accurate representation of what the Bible teaches. In fact, the stated reasons for not using the name, for ‘concealing’ it, and/or for using “some substitute for the divine name” all constitute strong evidence that, in fact, that is what happened to God’s name in both the LXX and the NT sometime after the first century CE.

Hallelujah! It has often been said that the “Tetragrammaton was not used by the inspired Christian writers”¹⁶⁹ of the New Testament. I believe such claims are irresponsible and that they are not based on a broad enough consideration of the best available evidence. Such conclusions are in fact based almost exclusively on what we find in copies of the NT that are perhaps one hundred years or more removed from the original NT writings. Further, it is not necessary for the “Tetragrammaton” itself, the four-letter form of the Hebrew or Aramaic name for God (יהוה), to have been used in the NT in order for the divine name to have appeared. Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic forms of the three-letter (יה or Ιαω) or the two-letter (יה or Ια) divine name could also have been used in the NT depending on what form of the name was in the OT text quoted or used by various NT writers.

When viewed in this light, even if we set aside the evidence considered earlier for the use of the divine name in the OT, and the special scribal convention of the *nomina sacra*, and the Greek philosophical reasons given by several early Christian and Jewish writers for ‘concealing’ the name of God, there are still at least four instances of God’s name in the NT. These four occurrences of the divine name are from the New Testament book of Revelation Chapter 19, in verses 1, 3, 4, 6. As noted earlier, the two-letter form of the divine name in Hebrew is today represented in square script as יה. This form of the name was used during the first and following centuries CE, and at times it was transliterated into Greek as Ια (*Ia*).

appeared if Gregory had used a Greek version like the kind that Origen describes as “more accurate” (see above, page 72).

¹⁶⁹ Lundquist, *The Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures*, page 150.

The two-letter form of God's name can be transliterated from Hebrew into English today as *Yah*, and it has been made into the English (Anglicized) word, "Jah." In its Hebrew stand-alone form "Jah" occurs at least 49 times in the OT. It is also used frequently as a prefix and as a suffix in compound names in- and outside of the Bible. Further, it is used at least 9 times standing alone or as a part of the expression "Hallelujah" in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6 this same expression ("Hallelujah") occurs. In Hebrew this expression is a combination of two words, הללו (*halelu* ["praise"]) and יה (*Yah* ["Jah"]).¹⁷⁰ In modern printed editions of the Greek text of Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6 we often find Ἀλληλουῖά, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew expression given in the preceding sentence. Like the Hebrew expression, the Greek transliteration is a combination or representation of the two Hebrew words in Greek, *allelou* ("praise") and *Ia* ("Jah").

In the most ancient manuscripts of the Greek text of Revelation this expression runs together without any spaces, just like most other Greek words in these texts. So it is not clear whether *Ia* occurred as a part of a single-word expression (as in our modern "Hallelujah") or if it was in fact the second of two words that together meant, "Praise Jah!" In either case, *Ia* in Revelation 19 is an undisputed instance of the divine name either standing alone or as part of an expression that involves 'praising' the God "Jah." It is this very name (*Ia*, "Jah") that writers like Theodoret represented as the Jewish pronunciation of the divine name in contrast to the Samaritan pronunciation (see the quotation at the end of my note 67).

Lundquist does not dispute that in Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6 the divine name occurs as *Ia*. His point of interest, however, is limited to "whether or not the inspired Christian writers used the

¹⁷⁰ Compare the occurrence of these words in the Hebrew of Ps 117, where we find in the first part of the verse *halelu* ("praise") followed by the Hebrew particle יהי (‘et), used in this case to identify the object of praise, that is, the divine name which follows it (the tetragrammaton). This string of words means exactly the same thing as the use of *haleluyah* (*halelu* + *yah*) at the end of Ps 117.

four Hebrew letters of the Tetragrammaton in their writing.”¹⁷¹ But, really, whether the divine name occurs in the form of the tetragrammaton (the four-letter Hebrew/Aramaic form) or some other form (such as the Greek two- or three-letter transliterations *Ia* or *Iao*, respectively), the form of the name used is not the primary issue where Jehovah’s Witnesses are concerned. The real question is simply whether *any* form of the divine name was used in the NT. Related to this is the question of how that name should be represented and used today in translations of the OT and NT.

Indeed, as noted earlier in this chapter, the tetragrammaton may really be only another way of writing the divine name as it was pronounced through other forms, such as the three-letter form *Yaho* (Hebrew) or *Iao* (Greek), or even by the two-letter form *Yah* (Hebrew) or *Ia* (Greek). Again, it is not simply the Hebrew/Aramaic tetragrammaton that is of interest to Jehovah’s Witnesses and to the Christian Witnesses of Jah, but *the use of the divine name in any form*. While Lundquist’s point of interest may be more narrowly related to the presence of the actual four-letter form of the divine name in the NT (for which there is credible manuscript evidence from OT source material quoted by NT writers), and though Lundquist accepts Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6 as NT texts wherein “the divine name does, in fact, occur in the Christian Scriptures,”¹⁷² he nonetheless observes and asks:

It is also interesting to note that the divine name was *not* removed from these four verses. To anyone familiar with the language background during the second and third centuries C.E., these four occurrences of the word *hallelujah* were obviously a reference to Jehovah. Why then, if there had been a heresy aimed at removing his name, were these verses overlooked?¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Lynn Lundquist, *The Divine Name in the New World Translation* (Portland, OR: Word Resources, 2001), page 58.

¹⁷² Lundquist, *The Divine Name in the New World Translation*, page 57. See also, Lundquist, *The Divine Name in the New World Translation*, page 61, where Lundquist writes that “the divine name is undeniably used four times at Rev 19:1-6.”

¹⁷³ Lundquist, *The Divine Name in the New World Translation*, page 61.

I have already shown that writers of the first century CE and thereafter, such as Philo of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and the author of the "Hortatory Address to the Greeks," explicitly taught things about God's name and about naming God that are not biblical. In fact, such teachings stem from Platonic and neo-Platonic thought. It is also clear that the earliest Christian NT manuscript tradition reveals a scribal practice known as *nomina sacra* ("sacred names"), which involves the use of specially marked abbreviations that substitute for the divine name in NT quotations of the OT. I also noted earlier (see pages 80-81) that this use of *nomina sacra* is like certain Jewish scribal conventions where the divine name is similarly (but not exactly) marked or surrogated when it occurs in the OT or in related literature.

Therefore, it is undeniable that sometime prior to, during, and after the first century CE the divine name was being treated in ways that are not according to any articulated biblical teaching concerning its use and its pronunciation. The question is, did the NT writers continue or did they establish on their own some tradition concerning the use of the divine name (such as the *nomina sacra*), or did those who copied the NT begin the use of such conventions? If those who passed on the original NT writings were the first users of the *nomina sacra*, then what did the NT writers use? In this light, I again present Lundquist's question, "Why then, if there had been a heresy aimed at removing his name, were these verses [Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6] overlooked?"

The answer is actually rather simple when considered in the context of the previously explained scribal treatments, manuscript variations, and Greek (unbiblical) philosophical views concerning the use of the divine name. Then there is the different ways that the words of the expression, "Praise Jah!" were considered during the time when Revelation was written or passed along. On this latter point, it is clear that there were at least three different schools of thought about the divine name that could have affected how a Jewish or a Jewish Christian scribe viewed the name *YH* (Hebrew) or *Ia* (Greek) when associated or used with the Hebrew (or transliterated Greek) word for "praise." Consider:

According to the tradition in one School, Hallelujah consists of two separate words and the second word or the monosyllable *jah* is the Divine name. Hence in writing it the Scribe must treat it as such, sanctify it when copying it and in case of an error must not erase it which he is allowed to do with an ordinary mistake. In harmony with this School, therefore, הללו *Hallu* is the imperative plural, יה *jah* the Divine name is the object, and the phrase must be translated *praise ye Jehovah*. And there can hardly be any doubt that this exhibits the primitive reading which is uniformly followed in the Authorised [*sic*] Version and in the Revised Version. According to the second School, however, Hallelujah is one inseparable word and the termination *jah* simply denotes *power, might, ...* Whilst according to the third School, Hallelujah though undivided still contains the sacred name and is, therefore, divine.¹⁷⁴

Ginsburg draws on the traditions regarding the understanding of “Hallelujah” in rabbinic thought through the Jerusalem (c. 350 CE) and Babylonian (late fourth century to early sixth century CE) Talmuds. These Talmuds contain Jewish rabbinic laws and customs found in the Mishnah (c. 200 CE), with discussions of it and debates over various rabbinic opinions. These traditions show that among religious Jews in the centuries following the writing of Revelation there were different views on the significance of the word “Hallelujah.” Revelation was not even accepted as a part of the New Testament canon until several centuries after it was written. Indeed, in the first Greek commentary on Revelation by Oecumenius (c. mid- to late-sixth or early seventh century CE), it is clear that by the time Revelation was accepted Christianity lost the biblical appreciation for the meaning of the divine name. After quoting Revelation 19:1-5, Oecumenius writes: “They were crying, [John] says, *Alleluia*. Allelulia is a Hebrew word; it means ‘Praise, laud God.’”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: Ktav Publishing House, 1966), pages 378-379.

¹⁷⁵ John N. Suggit, *Oecumenius: Commentary on the Apocalypse*, vol. 112 of *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), page 157.

In the preceding paragraph I wrote that by at least the time of Oecumenius, Christianity had “lost the biblical appreciation for the meaning of the divine name.” I say this here because Oecumenius substitutes “God” for “Jah” when giving the meaning of “Alleluia”! Though Jah is God (compare Revelation 19:5), the original meaning of “Hallelujah” is not “Praise God” but “Praise Jah” or “Praise Jehovah.” This is “incontestably established by the parallelism”¹⁷⁶ of OT texts such as Psalm 135:3: “Praise Jah [*halelu+yah* (יה)], for Jehovah [יהוה, *YHWH*] is good. Make melody to his name, for it is pleasant.” By the time the book of Revelation was fully accepted as part of the NT, or given serious exposition as a Christian document (such as by Oecumenius), the significance of the divine name in “Hallelujah” was lost and its meaning distorted by people like Oecumenius to mean “Praise, laud God.”

Based on all of the preceding evidence, it is no real surprise to find that Christian scribes and commentators in the centuries following the actual writing of the book of Revelation left *alleluia* in the text of Revelation 19:1-6. They simply interpreted it to mean something other than what it actually meant, effectively eliminating the divine name from the meaning of the text even though the divine name is still there. But those who “Praise Jah” in Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6 are not Jewish rabbis. They are not post-biblical Christian scribes or commentators. They are “a great crowd in heaven” (verses 1 and 3). They are “the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures” (verse 4). They are yet another “great crowd” whose voice is heard by John (verse 6). They are the Christian Witnesses of Jah, Jehovah’s Witnesses who reject the traditions of men where they invalidate teachings that for good reasons are attributable to both Jah God and to Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁷⁶ Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, page 379.

The Divine Name in the NT of the *New World Translation*

Variant readings. In 1 Corinthians 2:16 there is a good example of an NT text where manuscript variants might suggest that the divine name was used in the NT as part of a quoted, OT divine-name-containing text. Here Paul quotes from a Greek version of Isaiah 40:13, where instead of “spirit of Jehovah [= Hebrew text]” Paul is recorded as using “mind of $\kappa\epsilon\varsigma$,” where $\kappa\epsilon\varsigma$ is a *nomen sacrum* of $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ (*kyrios*), “Lord.” There is no variant for the word “Lord” here in Paul’s quotation of the Greek text of Isaiah 40:13. But the word for “Christ” in the latter part of the verse has a curious variant. Though “Christ” has strong support from early and late manuscripts, including P⁴⁶ \aleph A C D² Ψ 048 0150 (and a host of cursives), the reading “Lord” (in place of “Christ” in the part of the verse that does *not* quote Isaiah 40:13) is supported by B D^{*} F G (which group of manuscripts includes the fourth century CE Codex Vaticanus [B]).

The reading “Christ” is better supported textually, but “Lord” is by far the more difficult reading if Paul did not in fact use the divine name in his quotation of Isaiah 40:13. In other words, if Paul did *not* use the divine name when he here quoted Isaiah 40:13, and if “Christ” (as opposed to “Lord”) is the original reading for the last part of the verse, then those who accept this reading are in effect claiming that Paul wrote, “For ‘who has come to know the mind of the Lord, that we may instruct him?’ But we do have the mind of the Christ,” and that later scribes changed this to read, “For ‘who has come to know the mind of the Lord [$\kappa\epsilon\varsigma$], that we may instruct him?’ But we do have the mind of the Lord [$\kappa\epsilon\varsigma$]”!

The evidence to me suggests that it is highly unlikely that a scribe would fail to see this as a great oddity and even as a contradiction. It is much easier to explain the occurrence of the first “Lord” by arguing based on good reasons that the divine name was originally used in the NT in this quoted OT text in reference to God the Father. If “Lord” in the latter part of the verse (used for Jesus) is the original reading, then, at some point

in the transmission of this document the divine name in the OT quotation appears to have been removed, just as it was taken out of the Greek OT during the second and later centuries CE when it was replaced with "Lord" in its full form or as an abbreviation (*nomen sacrum*, $\kappa\epsilon$). Once this adjustment occurred, "Lord" in the latter part of the verse (for Jesus) was changed to "Christ" (as we see in P⁴⁶) so that the text now makes better sense, "For 'who has come to know the mind of the Lord, that we may instruct him?' But we do have the mind of the Christ."

There are other variants that might tell us something about whether or not the divine name was ever used in the original NT documents, such as the variants for the reading in Acts 20:28 (see my Second Edition of this book, pages 135-143). But I do not base my acceptance of any use of the divine name in the NT primarily on such manuscript variants. The good reasons that I accept and that I offer to others for believing that the original NT documents contained some form of the divine name in quotations of the Hebrew or the Greek OT are: 1) the pre-first century CE manuscript evidence for these quoted OT sources; 2) the treatment of the divine name in Greek OT texts during and/or after the same time the NT was written; and 3) the fact that the earliest NT copies we possess use special abbreviations for the divine name that appear to be scribal inventions that came about after the NT was written.

Further, 4) we have historical testimony from early writers such as Jerome and Gennadius that NT writers like Matthew faithfully quoted from the Hebrew text of the OT which, like the Greek OT (based on the available evidence) used by the NT writers, contained the divine name. For all of these reasons, I believe that the NT writers quoted from existing OT texts that contained the divine name and that they faithfully reproduced what we have good reasons to believe was in the text before them, that is, a form of the divine name. Finally, 5) I accept the four uses of "Hallelujah" in Revelation 19 as instances of the divine name's use in the present collection of NT documents. Properly understood in its historical context, the Greek name $\text{I}\alpha$ is a transliteration of God's name in Hebrew, "Yah," which is Anglicized today as "Jah." This form of the divine name is used

49 times as a stand-alone name for God in the OT; it is used as part of Hebrew proper names in- and outside of the Bible and throughout the biblical periods; and it is used by Origen, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Theodoret, Epiphanius, and others.

The basis for the use of the divine name in the NWT’s NT. However, those responsible for the translation and production of the NWT did not look only to the evidence given in the preceding paragraphs of the last sub-section for their use of the divine name in the NWT’s NT. The publishers of the NWT (the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society) offer other evidence when explaining the NWT’s use of the divine name in many of its NT passages. Therefore, since this book is a defense of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we must consider what many Jehovah’s Witnesses (in this case those associated with the Watchtower Society) have put forth as good reasons for the NWT’s use of the name in the NT.

Lundquist’s book contains much material that is useful when studying issues relating to the divine name in the Scriptures and he manifests a good knowledge of literature published by Jehovah’s Witnesses on this same subject. But some of his underlying assumptions, several of which have been considered in this Chapter and in my book, *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (pages 224-227, note 3), are not very credible. Lundquist also misinforms his readers about the textual basis for many uses of the name in the NWT’s NT.

For example, Lundquist seems to think that the NWT chose various Hebrew translations of the NT (which are referred to in many of the NWTNT’s footnotes) *over* the Christian Greek Scriptures in *every* instance.¹⁷⁷ The “Textual Symbols” in the front

¹⁷⁷ Referring to the NWT’s use of “J” documents, Lundquist writes, “*To accept late Hebrew translations as a higher authority than the best preserved Greek manuscripts from which they were translated violates our understanding of the canon of the Christian Greek Scriptures*” (Lundquist, *The Tetragrammaton in the Christian Greek Scriptures*, page 91 [the emphasis in this quote is original to Lundquist]). This same point is restated on page 92 of Lundquist’s book. On pages 49-50 of his book he also asks, “Why are Hebrew translations published in 1385 C.E. and later considered to be more reliable textual sources for the Christian Scriptures than the Christian Scriptures themselves ... ?” Lundquist also complains about the lack of agreement between the NWT’s use of the divine name and the circumlocution in the Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew text (*The Tetragrammaton in the Christian Greek Scriptures*, page

matter of the NWT (in the 1950 original and in the 1984 Reference editions) and in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* (hereafter, "KIT") editions (1969 and 1985) gives the dates for these "J" documents. It should also be quite obvious to any NWT and KIT reader, based on the information given, that none of these documents are older than the Greek witnesses cited in this same list. In fact, while the aforementioned editions of the NWT and the KIT do refer to these "J" documents as "support for [NWTNT's] renderings [of the divine name],"¹⁷⁸ these versions were not the stated basis upon which the NWT Committee sought to "correct" known copies of the NT writings when it came to the use of the divine name. The New World Bible Translation Committee was quite clear when it came to the basis for its use of the divine name in its NT:

67-69), as if NWT was somehow being unfaithful to a stated dependence upon the "J" documents, specifically J², which is the Hebrew version of Matthew's Gospel that is preserved in a fourteenth-century Jewish polemical work entitled *Eben Bohan* ("The Touchstone"), authored by Shem-Tob ben-Isaac ben Shaprut (hence the name "Shem-Tob"). But, again, Lundquist assumes that "the suitability of the Tetragrammaton for the 237 *Jehovah* passages [in the NWTNT] is derived *only* [emphasis Lundquist's] from later Hebrew translations" (*The Tetragrammaton in the Christian Greek Scriptures*, page 54), when in fact a good number of the 237 passages are based on quotations or paraphrases of OT texts that contain the divine name (see figure 1.2 below). Lundquist presents this same inaccurate view regarding NWT's use of the "J" documents elsewhere in his book (see, for example, his Chapter 6, particularly pages 80-82, and his figure 4 on his page 81) and in a brochure entitled, *A Field Service Encounter* (Portland, OR: Word Resources, 1998), which Lundquist has distributed along with his book. On page 46 of this brochure, for example, Lundquist says that "the evidence for the Tetragrammaton comes from translations made after 1385." But even in this brochure (page 56, note 17) Lundquist shows awareness of NWT's dependence on OT quotations for the use of the divine name in the NWTNT! This awareness should have qualified Lundquist's comment elsewhere regarding NWT's use of the "J" documents which, again, Lundquist inaccurately claims are the "only" basis for the 237 uses of the divine name in NWT's NT text.

¹⁷⁸ *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1950), Foreword, page 21. See also the 1984 Reference edition of NWT, Appendix 1D, page 1565; *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* (1969), Foreword, page 19, and the 1985 edition, Foreword, page 12, all published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Even in a "Questions from Readers" in *The Watchtower*, August 15, 1997, page 30 (where the issue of whether or not Shem-Tob's Matthew uses the tetragrammaton is discussed), while there is a reference to NWT's use of Shem-Tob since 1950 for "support" of NWTNT's use of the divine name, priority is still given to the fact that "Matthew quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures where the Tetragrammaton is found."

How is a modern translator to know or determine when to render the Greek words Κύριος [*Kyrios*, “Lord”] or Θεός [*Theos*, “God”] into the divine name in his version? By determining where the inspired Christian writers have quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures. Then he must refer back to the original to locate whether the divine name appears there. This way he can determine the identity to give to *ky'rios* and *theos*’ and he can then clothe them with personality.

Realizing that this is the time and place for it, we have followed this course in rendering our version of the Christian Greek Scriptures. To avoid overstepping the bounds of a translator into the field of exegesis, we have tried to be most cautious about rendering the divine name, always carefully considering the Hebrew Scriptures. We have looked for some agreement with the Hebrew versions [“J” documents] we consulted to confirm our own rendering.¹⁷⁹

These exact same comments are found in the 1969 edition of the KIT and in the Foreword to the 1985 edition of the KIT. The 1984 Reference edition of the NWT (in Appendix 1D) uses just slightly different wording in making these same points. The underlined words in the above quote appear in all four sources. It is clear, then, that the NWT Committee’s “support” from the “J” documents involved ‘looking for some agreement with the Hebrew versions’ “to confirm [their] own rendering,” a rendering that was based on “*determining where the inspired Christian writers have quoted from the [divine-name containing] Hebrew Scriptures.*” Lundquist is thus misinformed, and he misinforms his readers about the NWT’s reliance on the “J” documents.

How many times should the divine name be used in the NT? However, the NWT does not use the divine name in the NT only when there is a quote or a paraphrase of an OT text that contains the divine name. Therefore, with reference to those instances in the NWTNT where the divine name is used apart from the NWT Committee’s stated principle of “determining where the inspired Christian writers have quoted from the Hebrew

¹⁷⁹ *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, 1950 edition, Foreword, page 20 (underlining added).

Scriptures,” the position taken by Lundquist and others on the issue of ‘translating what is in the text’ has some merit.

Before elaborating further on this point, consider the tabulation in figure 1.2 below. Here “Q-P” indicates a direct quotation or paraphrase of an OT text containing God’s name. The category “YHWH’s Actions” indicates a quotation of an OT text relating to an action on Jah’s part that is preceded or followed by a reference to “God” or “Lord” in the NT, which has been rendered “Jehovah” in the NWT. In this category the OT quotation does not actually contain the divine name, but it relates to the actions or words of Jah as spoken of in the OT. The category “Context=YHWH” means that the NWT has used “Jehovah” *apart from any quotation or paraphrase of an OT text by an NT writer*, but where the context of the NT passage strongly supports the view that the use of “Lord” or “God” is a reference to Jah of the OT. The fifth column is labeled “?” to indicate those texts where the NWT uses “Jehovah” in an NT text apart from an OT quote or paraphrase, and where there is some legitimate question about the identity of the subject.

Figure 1.2
Basis for “Jehovah” in NWT’s New Testament

Bible Book	Q-P	YHWH’s Actions	Context=YHWH	?
Matthew	11	2	4	1
Mark	7	0	1	1
Luke	10	0	26	0
John	5	0	0	0
Acts	9	4	5	34
Romans	11	0	0	8
1Cor	8	1	0	6
2Cor	1	2	1	6
Galatians	1	0	0	0
Ephesians	0	0	2	4
Philippians	0	0	0	0
Colossians	0	0	1	5
1Th	0	0	0	4
2Th	0	0	0	3
1 Timothy	0	0	0	0

2 Timothy	0	0	0	4
Titus	0	0	0	0
Philemon	0	0	0	0
Hebrews	11	0	1	0
James	1	3	4	5
1 Peter	3	0	0	0
2 Peter	0	0	4	2
1 John	0	0	0	0
2 John	0	0	0	0
3 John	0	0	0	0
Jude	1	2	0	0
Revelation	0	0	12	0
Totals	79 ¹⁸⁰	14 ¹⁸¹	61 ¹⁸²	83 ¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Matt 3:3; 4:4, 7, 10; 5:33; 21:9, 42; 22:37, 44; 23:39; 27:10; Mr 1:3; 11:9; 12:11, 29 (twice), 30, 36; Lu 2:23; 3:4; 4:8, 12, 18, 19; 10:27; 13:35; 19:38; 20:42; Joh 1:23; 6:45; 12:13, 38 (twice); Ac 2:20, 21, 25, 34; 3:22; 4:26; 7:49 (LXX; after μοι [“for me”] some manuscripts [26, 239, the Lucianic recension and others] read λέγει κύριος [“Lord (Jehovah) says”], as we find in the quote in Ac 7:49); 15:17 (twice; quote from the LXX; for this text’s inclusion of “the Lord” [τὸν κύριον] into the text of Amos 9:12, see A, 49, 198, 407, 456, 534 and others); Rom 4:3, 8; 9:28, 29; 10:13, 16; 11:3, 34; 12:19; 14:11; 15:11; 1Co 1:31; 2:16; 3:20; 10:21 (twice), 22, 26; 14:21; 2Co 10:17; Gal 3:6; Heb 2:13; 7:21; 8:8, 9, 10, 11; 10:16, 30; 12:5, 6; 13:6; Jas 2:23; 1Pe 1:25; 3:12 (twice); Jude 9.

¹⁸¹ Matt 1:22; 2:15; Ac 7:31, 33; 8:22, 24; 1Co 10:9; 2Co 6:17, 18; Jas 5:10, 11 (twice); Jude 5, 14 (compare 1 Enoch 1:9; see also “Put Up A Hard Fight For the Faith,” *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1998, page 16).

¹⁸² Matt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; Mr 13:20; Lu 1:6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 25, 28, 32, 38, 45, 46, 58, 66, 68, 76; 2:9 (twice), 15, 22, 23, 24, 26, 39; 5:17; 20:37; Ac 2:39 (compare 2:22, 32, 36); 3:19; 4:29 (compare 4:30); 10:33 (see verse 36); 14:3 (compare 2:19); 2Co 10:18; Eph 2:21 (compare 2:20); 5:19 (compare 5:20); Col 3:16; Heb 8:2; Jas 1:7 (compare 1:1, 5); 2:23; 3:9; 5:4 (OT description for Jehovah); 2Pe 2:11; 3:8, 9, 10; Rev 1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:17; 15:3, 4; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6; 21:22; 22:5, 6.

¹⁸³ Matt 28:2; Mr 5:19 (compare Ex 18:8); Ac 1:24; 2:47; 5:9, 19; 7:60 (see 7:59); 8:25, 26, 39; 9:31; 11:21; 12:7, 11, 17, 23, 24; 13:2, 10, 11, 12, 44, 47 (but compare Isa 42:6), 48, 49; 14:23; 15:35, 36, 40; 16:14, 15, 32; 18:21, 25; 19:20; 21:14; Rom 12:11; 14:4, 6 (three times), 8 (three times); 1Co 4:4, 19; 7:17; 11:32; 16:7, 10; 2Co 3:16, 17 (twice), 18 (twice); 8:21; Eph 5:17 (compare 5:10 [P⁴⁶ reads, “the Christ”]); 6:4, 7 (compare ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ [“as to the Lord”] with ὡς τῷ χριστῷ [“as to Christ”] in verse 5), 8; Col 1:10; 3:13 (compare Ac 5:31), 22, 23, 24 (for verses 22, 23 and 24, compare the latter part of verse 24); 1Th 1:8; 4:6 (compare 2Th 1:7-9), 15; 5:2; 2Th 2:2, 13; 3:1; 2Ti 1:18; 2:19 (twice); 4:14; Jas 1:12 (compare Rev 2:10); 4:10, 15; 5:14, 15; 2Pe 2:9; 3:12 (note the use of *parousia*).

The significance of the above totals relates to the number of times the NWT used the divine name in the NT without the support of an OT quotation or paraphrase. My analysis reveals that there are 79 instances where an NT writer is quoting or paraphrasing an OT text that contains the divine name.¹⁸⁴ These 79 uses of the divine name in the NWT's NT are based on good reasons since the evidence supports the conclusion that the NT writers quoted from an OT Greek or Hebrew text that contained a form of the divine name. In the 14 instances where there is some reference made to Jah's actions or words in the OT, and where there is also use of the *nomen sacrum* or the complete Greek word for "Lord" in the NT, I believe that it should be left up to the translator whether or not to use the divine name to identify the person so described or to simply use the word or the abbreviation that is in the translated text that does not quote from an OT source. The reason for this is because it is historically accurate to say that Jah is the one who spoke the words or who performed the actions that are attributed to him in these NT passages. But because these texts do not involve actual quotations of OT source material, then it is not as likely that the divine name was in fact used even though Jah of the OT is the subject of the discussion.

In this light, apart from the four instances of *Ia* in Revelation 19, the most credible uses of the divine name in the NWTNT are the 79 instances where the NT quotes an OT divine-name-containing text. Those places where the OT is not quoted cannot be considered as credible as the quoted texts, since for the 14 non-quotation-based instances we simply do not have as good of reasons as we do for the 79 quotation-based texts on which to rely when deciding whether to use the divine name. Additionally, there are another 61 instances where the NWTNT uses the divine name

¹⁸⁴ My totals (and my classification, to some degree) differ from Lundquist's study (*The Tetragrammaton in the Christian Greek Scriptures*, page 50). For example, Lundquist found 92 instances that he believed were direct quotations from the OT where the divine name is used in the source text. This may be because sometimes it is difficult to determine when there is a quotation. Therefore, I have allowed for paraphrases of OT texts in the Q-P category (see note 180). But my numbers are still lower than Lundquist's. My analysis was based on a careful consideration of each verse listed on pages 1565-1566 of the NWT Reference edition (1984), in its Appendix 1D.

apart from any OT reference whatsoever, but only because in the NWT Committee’s view the context of the NT text favors interpreting the NT terms “Lord” or “God” in reference to Jehovah. In these instances one could legitimately argue that the best choice would have been to use the terms that are actually in the available NT documents and then simply point out in a footnote or by means of a cross-reference that in the translators’ view this is a reference to the Lord Jehovah, not to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The final 83 instances of the divine name in the NT of the NWT are even more open to interpretation. Again, since the referent in these 83 instances is so uncertain then it is the reader, not the translator, who should decide if the reference is to Jesus Christ or to his God and Father, Jah (Micah 5:4; John 8:54). This is true even when the reference is to the “word of the Lord” or to the “will of the Lord” since Jesus’ will and word are the same as that of his Father (compare John 7:16-17; 5:19, 30; 12:49-50). In fact, in Romans 10:17 we have an example of a scribal conflict over the reading “word of Christ” (P⁴⁶ ⲛ* B C D* Vulgate) and the “word of God” (ⲛ^c A Syriac *Peshitta*). Then there are the references to “the Lord’s [NWT: Jehovah’s] angel” (see, for example, Acts 8:26). But given Jesus’ exalted status in the NT, as chief of the angels, as the one to whom all authority on earth *and in heaven* has been given, and as the one who speaks and who is spoken of as having angels under his command, we cannot be certain that NT references to “the Lord’s angel” are not in fact references to Jesus’ angel.—Matthew 28:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 12:7; 22:16.

Also, there is one instance where the NWT Committee acknowledges not having any agreement with the “J” documents for its use of the divine name, that is, in 1 Corinthians 7:17. Here again it is not clear whether it is Jah, the Father, who is in view. The NWT Reference Bible (1984) refers to 2 Corinthians 10:13 and to Romans 12:3 as support for using “Jehovah” in this text, and it very well could be a reference to Jah for in 2 Corinthians 10:13 Paul refers to a certain “territory” that “God” has “apportioned” to him and to others, and in Romans 12:3 he refers to “God” who ‘distributes a measure of faith.’ But in the text of 1 Corinthians 7:17 Paul speaks of “the Lord” who gives each one a “portion” so he or she can “walk as God has called him [or her].” Further, in

view of the distinction between “God” and the “Lord” whom God raised up from the dead in 1 Corinthians 6:14, together with the teaching that the Lord (Jesus), God, and the holy spirit are said to have authority over various “gifts,” “ministries,” and “operations” in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, the identity of “the Lord” in 1 Corinthians 7:17 is not clear.

The fact that my conclusions on this matter point to fewer uses of the divine name in the NT than we presently find in the NWT does not mean that the NWT Committee did not have their reasons for using the divine name 237 times; they did have some reasons. The point here is simply this: the basis for using the divine name in the NT should be open to as few questions as possible, since we do not have the original NT manuscripts at our disposal. But, setting aside the uses of *Ia* (*YaH* [“Jah”]) in Revelation 19, compared to the 79 quotations of OT divine-name-containing texts the other 158 uses of the divine name in the NTWNT are not based on the best available reasons. In fact, again, in many instances the identity of the “Lord” in some of the “Jehovah” texts in the NWTNT may very well be the Lord Jesus Christ. While on some exegetical level it may be appropriate to identify Jesus as Jah (see Chapters 2 and 4), the NWT Committee did not believe this identification was appropriate and so they made a decision about the identity of the “Lord” in these 158 NT texts that is disputable for good reasons.

By not making clear the different reasons for each instance of the divine name in its NT, the NWT Committee exposed the use of the divine name in the NT to warranted criticism, namely, that the basis for the NWT's use of the divine name in the 158 instances listed in the last three columns of figure 1.2 (the OT ‘actions of Jehovah’ texts, the ‘contextual Jehovah references,’ and the “J”-document-guided texts) does not outweigh the testimony of the available NT witnesses. However, since the NWT translators have gone to great lengths to help their readers understand the basis for their use of the divine name in these 158 instances, providing a substantial amount of relevant data in footnotes, in forewords, and in appendices, then the Committee cannot rightly be spoken of as having attempted to deceive anyone. They simply did not make good choices for their use of “Jehovah” in a good number of instances in the NWTNT.

Though the NWT Committee may have gone too far in using the divine name in the NT (since a number of such passages could very well apply to someone other than to Jah of the OT), the NWT Committee certainly has done more than any other Bible translation when it comes to explaining the importance of using the divine name. It also uses the divine name in at least 79 but possibly in as many as 93 or even 154 NT texts where there are in fact very good reasons to use it.

The Meaning of God’s Name

What do names tell us? Really, though, even if we were to find a manuscript of the New Testament containing the divine name (that is, other than the form *Ia* used in Revelation 19), would most Bible translators today use it? After all, no one disputes the appearance of the divine name in the OT nearly 7,000 times. Yet, consider how few modern translations give the divine name its rightful place there. As we have already discussed, the fact that we may no longer know the original pronunciation of the divine name used by Moses and others is not a good reason to avoid using the name altogether. Nowhere does the Bible say that ancient Hebrew names, including God’s name, must be pronounced in one specific way. In short, *there is no legitimate, scriptural reason to avoid using some form of the divine name found in the Hebrew Scriptures.*

When it comes to making known the name of God that appears thousands of times in the OT, Dr. Robert Countess criticizes Jehovah’s Witnesses’ use of John 17:6, 26, believing that these two scriptures are understood by the Witnesses to mean that Jesus restored the true pronunciation of the divine name.¹⁸⁵ But such is not the case. While Jehovah’s Witnesses do believe that Jesus’ words here involve the *use* of the divine name, they also believe that by using a form of this name Jesus was “revealing the Person it represents ... enabling persons to know or experience

¹⁸⁵ Countess, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New Testament*, pages 31-32.

what God's name stands for (Mt 11:27; Joh 1:14, 18; 17:6-12).¹⁸⁶

The word "name" is used in the Bible to refer to the character of a person (for example, Deuteronomy 22:14, 19; Ruth 4:11; Nehemiah 9:10 ['reputation']; Job 18:17; Ecclesiastes 7:1). But it is also quite regularly used in reference to the actual name of someone, such as when reference is made to 'calling on the name of Jehovah' (compare Genesis 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 16:13; 21:33; and many others). Regarding the former use of the word "name," consider 1 Samuel 25:25 where Abigail pleads with David: "Please do not let my lord set his heart upon this good-for-nothing man Nabal [meaning, 'senselessness'], for, *as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and senselessness is with him*" (emphasis added). This account shows a clear difference but also a close association between the actual name of a person and the person's character.

It is likely that a difference existed between the northern and southern dialects of the ancient Jewish nation,¹⁸⁷ such that

¹⁸⁶ *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), page 72. In this publication, on page 467, we are also told: "When Jesus Christ was on earth, he 'made his Father's name manifest' to his disciples. (Joh 17:6, 26) Although having earlier known that name and being familiar with God's activities as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, these disciples came to know Jehovah in a far better and grander way through the One who is 'in the bosom position with the Father' (Joh 1:18)."

¹⁸⁷ Millard, "YW and YHW," page 312, argues as follows:

In order to deal with the problem of variation between *yw* and *yhw* as initial elements of Hebrew names in the Old Testament, an equally detailed study of the final elements *yh*, *yhw*, *yw* is needed, embracing both the Biblical and epigraphic records. ... The opposition *-yh* : *-yhw* may be no more than scribal inconsistency. ... The seals bearing names ending in *yw* and *yhw* are so similar in form and style of lettering to those bearing names commencing with the same elements that it would be impossible to adopt a higher date for one group than for the other.

In view of this variation it is possible that the divine name was pronounced differently in the northern kingdom than it was in the southern kingdom. If such a difference did exist then this would further suggest that there was no singularly precise way to pronounce the divine name even in ancient times, but that location and dialect produced acceptable variations in its pronunciation. Thus, no one today could rightly be faulted for using a less-than-precise pronunciation as language, dialect, location, and time have similarly affected our pronunciation. As long as we base our pronunciation on the best available evidence, whatever pronunciation we use in our native language should be acceptable.

“Nabal” could have had a dignified meaning in one dialect and a negative association in another. The dignified meaning was no doubt intended by his parents, for they likely would not have named their son “senselessness”! When his personality became manifest, however, his wife used the other, more derogatory meaning of his name in reference to him.¹⁸⁸ This is but one example in the Hebrew Scriptures where the meaning of a person’s name is directly linked with his or her character. But the name itself is crucial to the understanding of the person’s character, and it still exists separately as an actual name.

If God’s own revelation of the meaning of his name is also directly related to his character, then would it not be a careless and horrible mistake to conclude that Jesus could have made his Father’s name (his character) known without using the very name that is bound together with his Father’s character? Jesus’ use of the word “name” in verses like John 17:6 can no more be limited to character (that is, apart from a knowledge of a person’s actual name) than a reference to Jesus’ own “name” (his character) could be made without a knowledge of his God-given name, which name itself reveals what kind of person he is or would become, namely, one who ‘saves his people from their sins.’—Matthew 1:21.

Countess believes that since there is no record in the NT of Jesus’ accusers citing his use of the divine name as blasphemy then that means Jesus did not use the divine name.¹⁸⁹ If true, then this argument from silence would only apply to those occasions where Jesus taught in the presence of those seeking to condemn him. But as William Arnold points out: “The mere utterance of the name, apart from perjury, cursing, or blasphemy, was indeed at no time a criminal offense; but it soon came to be considered a

¹⁸⁸ In a similar vein, we may note that the word “Satan” may not have been the name given to this spirit being by Jah before Satan deceived Eve (Gen 3:1-5). Either this came to be his name after his actions made it a fit description of his character and disposition as a “resister,” or it was his name all along and it simply took on a new meaning after he ‘resisted’ Jah’s will and purpose.

¹⁸⁹ Countess, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New Testament*, page 31.

ritual sin, punishable by God though not by man.”¹⁹⁰ Arnold's observations are consistent with the information presented on pages 4-7 of this chapter, namely, that there is no clearly stated biblical law or established ancient practice by the Jews in general prior to 200 CE, against the use of the divine name in worship or in social situations with others. There are only biblical laws and, hence, potentially only a general Jewish practice against certain *misuses* of the name. Any other prohibition concerning the use of the divine name does not have any explicit biblical support.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christian Witnesses of Jah believe that Jesus not only used his Father's name when quoting the OT text where the divine name occurs (for example, in Luke 4:17-18), but we also believe that he made known God's character by his use of the name when teaching about Jah. For example, Jesus made it plain that the Father was doing his works through the Son (John 14:10) thereby causing his own purposes to be fulfilled in connection with his anointed one (Luke 4:18-21). As David confronted the God-dishonoring Goliath “with the name of Jehovah of armies,” so Jesus “came in the name of [his] Father,”

¹⁹⁰ William R. Arnold, “The Divine Name in Exodus iii. 14,” *JBL* 24 (1905), page 135. In this same article, in his notes 33 and 34, Arnold observes:

According to *b. Aboda Zara* 17 *b*, under Roman rule in the second century A.D. Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion was burned at the stake, his wife executed, and his daughter condemned to a life of shame, for no other cause than that the Rabbi had pronounced the ineffable name in public hearing. But the ground alleged for the outrage is rejected even by those who accept as historical all the other details of the Talmudic story. ... In Mishna, *Berachoth*, ix. 5, there is no talk of the utterance of the word יהוה [Jehovah]. The question there is merely whether one shall or shall not use the divine name in ordinary salutation.

In *Sanhedrin* 7.5 we are told, “*He who blasphemes is liable only when he will have fully pronounced the divine Name*” (Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* [New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988], page 597 [emphasis added]). Of course, this by no means establishes that an inaccurate understanding of Lev 24:11 (see above, page 5, note 7) would have been used by Jesus' enemies in the first century CE. Additionally, *Sotah* 7.6 informs us, “In the sanctuary one says the Name as it is written but in the provinces, with a euphemism.” This seems to imply the preservation of an accepted pronunciation of the divine name, and it specifically indicates its use by the priests. Of course, this cannot be considered definitive in terms of establishing the use of the divine name in the first century CE. But it does show that even the compilers of the Mishnah (200 CE) acknowledged that the priests pronounced the divine name “as it is written.”

bringing the good news of God’s kingdom and hope for all mankind.—Luke 4:43; John 5:43.

To suggest that Jesus came “in the name of [his] Father” without ever using the Father’s name, a name that is found in the OT nearly 7,000 times and that occurred in the biblical text that Jesus read to others, is not a suggestion that is based on the best available evidence. The character of a person is connected with that person’s name, and so where one is made known (either the character or the actual name of the person) the other is also revealed.

What meaning is associated with the divine name in the Bible? It is often believed that the tetragrammaton, YHWH, is related to the Hebrew verb “to be,” which is הָיָה (*hayah*). Such a view is usually presented with the belief that while the tetragrammaton contains the Hebrew letter *waw* (ו), originally so did the Hebrew verb *hayah* (which would be *hawah* [הוּוּה]). Later, however, the *waw* was “replaced by a ך [yod] in the verb הָיָה [*hayah*] with which the [divine] name is connected—a change that took place long before the time of Moses.”¹⁹¹ But it may also be the case that the tetragrammaton is not related etymologically to the verb *hay/wah*, at all. God’s name can still be filled with meaning without having to derive its meaning from a particular Hebrew verb.

Nevertheless, some scholars and others still believe that the name of God, the tetragrammaton, is derived from the Hebrew verb *hayah* which is used, for example, in Exodus 3:14. Here, together with verse 13, Moses speaks to God with the words: “Suppose I am now come to the sons of Israel and I do say to them, ‘The God of your forefathers has sent me to you,’ and they do say to me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say to them?” Jehovah then responds to Moses with the Hebrew expression, *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* (NWT: “I shall prove to be what I shall prove to be”). The Greek translation often referred to as the Septuagint or LXX

¹⁹¹ Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” *JBL* 80.4 (December, 1961), page 322.

renders this expression with the words, *ego eimi ho on* (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν ["I am the Being (the *ho on*)" or "I am the One who is"]).

It is understandable, therefore, why some early and late writers on the subject of God's name have connected its meaning with the verbal ideas expressed in Exodus 3:14. In this light, consider again what was presented earlier (page 43, note 66) in connection with the meaning and the pronunciation of the divine name from the writings of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 220 CE): "Further, the mystic name of four letters which was affixed to those alone to whom the adytum was accessible, is called Jave [Ἰαοὺ, *Iaou*], which is interpreted, 'Who is and shall be' [ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐσόμενος, *ho on kai ho esomenos*]." ¹⁹²

Whether or not the divine name means "who is and who shall be" because it is derived from the same verb used in the Hebrew of Exodus 3:14 or because Jah's response to Moses closely relates his name to the expression *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* (a variation of which is given by Clement that seems to be related to both the Hebrew and the Greek texts of Exodus 3:14), is impossible to know for a certainty. The divine name could mean "who is and who shall be" simply because that is one of the meanings that God himself gave to his name when he spoke to Moses in Exodus 3. As Harris observes:

Why base anything on the expression, "I will be what I will be," whether it is *hiphil* or *qal* or imperfect or participle (as some have suggested), if the Name may not have any etymological connection with the verb anyhow? We ought to be delivered at last from the endless debate as to whether the name means "be," "create," "will be," "will become," "will be present," etc. It may mean none of these things. ... As to the meaning, the Name is explained in the entire Old Testament. He is creator, redeemer, sovereign, holy, a God of love, merciful, gracious, long-suffering, and much more. The Name is explained by the attributes of God revealed in his Word. ¹⁹³

¹⁹² *The Stromata*, ANF 2, Book 5, chap. 6, page 452.

¹⁹³ Harris, "The Pronunciation of the Tetragram," pages 222-223. See Buchanan, "Some Unfinished Business with the Dead Sea Scrolls," pages 417-418, and especially the discussion on pages 12-20 of Barry J. Beitzel, "Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name:

Those attributes certainly include what is said to Moses in Exodus 3:14, but there it is not certain that this is because of any derivation of the tetragrammaton or any form of the divine name from the verb *hayah*, which is the verb from which *’ehyeh* (in this context, likely something along the lines of “I will be”) derives. It is enough to know that the things that are said about Jah in the OT are what we should associate with the use of his name, even if we do not know what it is that the name means etymologically. But since what is said in Exodus 3:14 is so powerfully connected with the meaning of God’s name and with the revelation of his person to the people of Israel, let us look closer at the meaning of *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* before concluding this chapter.

The translation and the meaning of Exodus 3:14. We have already introduced this text, the question by Moses, and the response by Jah, which response we then compared in both Hebrew (*’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*) and in the Greek LXX (*ego eimi ho on*). With this in mind, the following questions naturally arise: What is the meaning of the Hebrew expression? Is the LXX reading an accurate representation of the meaning of the Hebrew expression? What does the Greek translation mean?

Instead of looking outside of the text and going beyond its historical and grammatical contexts, our “primary understanding of Exodus 3:14 should come, rather, from a contextual understanding of the passage as well as from an analysis of the meaning and usage of the Hebrew term הָיָה [*hayah*, ‘to be (exist)’ or ‘to come to be’¹⁹⁴] and its imperfect form הִיְיָהוּ [*’ehyeh*].”¹⁹⁵ The immediate

A Case of Biblical Paronomasia,” *Trinity Journal* 1 NS (1980), where Beitzel refers to the “veritable kaleidoscope of etymological speculation” ranging from a Sumerian, Egyptian, Akkadian, Indo-European, Hurrian, and other language etymologies (page 12). Beitzel also notes that attempts to associate the tetragrammaton with the verb *hayah* involve “a hypothetical antique verb” *hawah*, which does not occur in any “West Semitic languages which antedate the Mosaic era” (pages 15, 16). “Paronomasia” involves a play on words of one sort or another.

¹⁹⁴ Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” page 328, note 62, cites the view of A.B. Davidson, namely, that *hayah* “corresponds not to εἶναι [*einai*, ‘to be’ or ‘to exist’] but to γίνεσθαι [*ginesthai*, ‘to become’ or ‘to come to be’],” meaning that “the expression ‘I will be’ is an historical formula referring, not to the nature of God, but to what he will show himself to be to his covenant people.” M.F. Burnyeat, “Platonism in the Bible: Numenius of Apamea on *Exodus* and Eternity,” in *The Revelation of the*

and the broader contexts of Exodus 3:14 help us appreciate how we can understand the use of *'ehyeh* in this text. Gianotti writes:

God's manifestation to Israel is yet future at the time of the burning bush incident. This יהי־הוּא [*'ehyeh*] is God's promise that He will redeem the children of Israel. The people were in great need. They needed not so much to know the facts about God's character or that He was simply a covenant God present in their time of need, but to be reassured that this God would meet them in their time of need, proving true His character and promises. This in fact constitutes what God promised Moses in Exodus 3:12, namely, that God would be present and working on Moses' behalf in the difficult task ahead. Surely nothing less would have encouraged Moses to go. ... Whatever the situation or need (in particular, the redemption from Egypt, but also future needs) God will "become" the solution to that need.¹⁹⁶

Many Trinitarians have connected the translation of the first *'ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14 by *ego eimi* in the LXX with the use of *ego eimi* in the NT by Jesus (for example, in John 8:58). Their arguments on this and related points will be considered in Chapter 3. Here it is enough simply to note that the context of Exodus 3:14 "hardly warrants the suggestion that ἐγώ εἰμι [*ego eimi*] functions alone as the divine name, since here it is not alone (compare Exod. 6.7; 7.5; 20.1[2])."¹⁹⁷ Again, the LXX reads, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν (*ego*

Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity, George H. van Kooten, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), page 147, note 27, refers to an interesting "variant translation given by Hippolytus [c. 170-235 CE] in his account of a self-styled Gnostic sect, the Naasenes: γίνομαι ὃ θέλω καὶ εἰμὶ ὃ εἰμὶ [*ginomai ho thelo kai eimi ho eimi*, 'I will become who/what I choose/will and I am who/what I am'] ... The first clause comes close to 'I will be what I will be', which knowledgeable colleagues tell me is the meaning of the original."

¹⁹⁵ Charles Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," *BSac* 39 (January-March 1985), page 42.

¹⁹⁶ Gianotti, "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," page 46.

¹⁹⁷ Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 69; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), page 85. See also J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), page 67, who observes:

The argument that has continued for two millennia over the translation of that verse in the Septuagint [Ex 3:14] and over the part it has played in the English translation 'I

eimi ho on, “I am the Being” or “I am the One who is”), identifying God as the *ho on*, not as the *ego eimi*.

There are good reasons, however, for rejecting the LXX’s rendering as an accurate representation of the Semitic thought conveyed by *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14, which thought is in the NWT expressed as, “I shall prove to be what I shall prove to be.” The translation found in many other English versions assumes a present meaning for *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* that is not well founded. As Charles Gianotti points out, a present reading such as “I am that I am” is “unjustified in light of the imperfect form, אֶהְיֶה [*’ehyeh*], used in Exodus 3:14.” Gianotti also notes Bernhardt’s observation that the imperfect form of this verb never has present meaning but that, for this, the perfect form is used. Gianotti concludes: “Significantly, most interpreters translate אֶהְיֶה in Exodus 3:12 as future (i.e., ‘I will be [אֶהְיֶה] with you’). Yet, two verses later, why should not the same translation suffice?”¹⁹⁸

Another way of looking at the meaning of the Hebrew text, one that also considers the reading of the LXX and the infrequent but possible present meaning of *’ehyeh* is as follows:

The form of the verb that is nowadays called in Hebrew ‘imperfect’ or ‘future’ could signify any tense, past, present, and future, and this is how it was already understood in the first centuries CE in *Shemot* or *Exodus Rabba* 3.6 by Rabbi Isaac who said: ‘God said to Moses: Tell them that I am now what I always was and always will be’; for this reason the word אֶהְיֶה [*’ehyeh*] is written three times.¹⁹⁹

am what I am’ or ‘I am that I am’ has surely confirmed the charge that ‘I am’ is not a proper translation for a Hebrew imperfect. ... In view of the strong emphasis in the early verses of the chapter upon Yahweh’s keeping of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the second imperfect could be a repetition of this great truth. ... a statement of Yahweh’s faithfulness so brief as to be amazing and so meaningful as to be inspiring.

¹⁹⁸ Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” page 42. I should point out, however, as does Gianotti (page 50, note 32), that Bernhardt “admits to a possibility of a present tense rendering in Ruth 2:13, but agrees that otherwise the meaning is always future.” I would add to Ruth 2:13 the possibility of a present meaning for *’ehyeh* in Job 12:4 and Job 17:6.

¹⁹⁹ Wout Jac. van Beekum, “What’s in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition,” in *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives*

Whether this was the understanding of the Hebrew word *'ehyeh* or the meaning of the expression *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* in the first century CE or earlier by Jews and by early Christians there is an interesting potential parallel to a similar understanding of the Judeo-Christian God in Revelation 1:4. Here the NWT reads (together with verse 5):

May YOU have undeserved kindness and peace from “The One who is [ὁ ὢν, *ho on*] and who was [ὁ ἦν, *ho en*] and who is coming [ὁ ἐρχόμενος, *ho erkhomenos*],” and from the seven spirits that are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, “the Faithful Witness,” “The firstborn from the dead,” and “The Ruler of the kings of the earth.”

In addition to the verbal concepts of ‘being,’ ‘having been,’ and ‘coming,’ which are similar in at least two respects to the verbal concepts that Clement of Alexandria associated with the divine name (again, ‘who is and who shall be’ [ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐσόμενος, *ho on kai ho esomenos*]), what is also interesting about Revelation 1:4 is the fact that, as it reads in our present collection of Greek manuscripts, it requires that we take the nominatives translated “the one who is,” “the one who was,” and “the one who is coming” as objects of a preposition (ἀπὸ, *apo* [“from”]). On the other hand, the prepositional objects “Jesus Christ” and “the seven spirits” are in the expected genitive case. As Shaw points out, “I think we would be hard pressed to find many nominatives used as objects of prepositions, since this is esp[ecially] harsh grammatically.”²⁰⁰

What is more, each of the genitives “Jesus Christ” and “the seven spirits” *have modifiers!* In other words, the genitive case “Jesus Christ” is the object of the preposition “from,” as is the genitive case object “the seven spirits.” “Genitive” in this case means simply the common grammatical form that objects of this preposition take in Greek. But both of them are modified further

from *Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, George H. van Kooten, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), page 7.

²⁰⁰ Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of ἰαω,” page 173, note 87.

by “the Faithful Witness,” “the firstborn from the dead,” and “the Ruler of the kings of the earth” (for “Jesus Christ”). “The seven spirits” are modified by the relative clause “that are before his throne.” In this light, Shaw appropriately asks, “Isn’t it likely then that the first instance originally had something comparable?”²⁰¹

“Something comparable” in this case would have to be either a genitive case object of the preposition “from” (such as the word “God” [Greek: θεοῦ or τοῦ θεοῦ]) or “a tetragram in ‘Aramaic’ or paleo-Hebrew script or an instance of Ιαω”!²⁰² If “God” originally stood as the genitive object of “from,” then it is not clear why it was removed. But based on the treatment of the divine name in Christian copies of the LXX and (possibly) the NT, it is easy to see how the divine name could also have stood as the object of “from” in Revelation 1:4, and then later the name was removed leaving the nominatives “the one who is,” “the one who was,” and “the one who is coming” as the objects of the preposition. This is very strange indeed, because based on the grammatical structure of the text these nominatives should more appropriately be modifiers of another object (such as the divine name, or even “God” or “Lord”), similar to what we see in this very text with “Jesus Christ” and with “the seven spirits.”

Therefore, we not only find in Revelation 1:4 a further association of meaning for the name of God that is similar to what we read in Exodus 3:14 and in early writers such as Clement of Alexandria, but we have grammatical evidence for yet another occurrence of the divine name in the NT, this time apart from any quotation of an OT divine-name-containing text. Why, though, do we find *ho on* (“the one who is”) used both as an apparent translation of *’ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14 and associated with God or with the name of God in Revelation 1:4, 8, when *’ehyeh* by most accounts and according to regular usage means “I will be”?

It should be remembered that the LXX was not the only Greek translation completed by Jews and available for use during the first and following centuries CE. For example, in the

²⁰¹ Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” page 172.

²⁰² Shaw, “The Earliest Non-mystical Jewish Use of Ιαω,” page 173.

translation of Aquila (followed by Theodotion) we do not find *ho on* as a translation of *ʾehyeh* in Exodus 3:14, but rather ἐσομαι ὃς ἐσομαι (*esomai hos esomai*, “I will be what/who I will be”)! As I noted earlier, this is the same verb used by Clement of Alexandria (in addition to *ho on*) when explaining the meaning of the divine name. So it is right that we ask which translation is correct, or which is a more accurate representation of the Hebrew text.

The translations of Aquila and Theodotion certainly seem to follow more closely the structure of the Hebrew text, in that there is a clearer correspondence between the two *ʾehyehs* and the relatives *ʾasher* and *hos*, whereas there is no relative in the LXX reading. It may have been that the LXX translators were simply “faced with making sense out of a sentence which would be a tautology [to a Greek mind] if rendered literally.”²⁰³ It should be remembered, as we discussed earlier in this chapter, that during the time the LXX was translated in the early third century BCE the Jews in many respects had become thoroughly Hellenized. Gianotti explains:

It is relatively easy to imagine the backslidden Jews, a few hundred years after the Exile, having lost touch with the character and nature of their God YHWH. In such a condition

²⁰³ John W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (SBLSCS 30; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), page 33. Arnold, “The Divine Name in Exodus iii. 14,” pages 126-127, writes: “The Greek rendering of אֶהְיֶה [*ʾehyeh*] ὁ ὢν [*ho on*], introduces a concept as foreign to the Hebrew mind as it is to the Hebrew verb. ... Thus the Hebrew for *I am that I am* is not אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה [*ʾehyeh ʾasher ʾehyeh*], nor does it differ from that clause only in the matter of the tense of the verb. A nominal instead of a verbal sentence is required. The Hebrew for *I am that I am* is אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי [*ʾani ʾasher ʾani*], just as *I am he* is אֲנִי הוּא [*ʾani hu*]. The Imperfect אֶהְיֶה [*ʾehyeh*] can only [or, more accurately, almost always seems to] mean *I am in the act of becoming*, or *I will become*, or *I will be* ... In no way can it be rendered *I am*. ... אֶהְיֶה [*ʾehyeh*] in this sentence can only mean *I will be* or *become (something)* ... Not merely the most natural, then, but the necessary construction of אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה [*ʾehyeh ʾasher ʾehyeh*], is *I will be what I will be*. So much for the literal meaning of the Hebrew clause.” Before Arnold, S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*, 3d. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), page 43, sec. 38, note 1, showed his preference for the translation, “I will be that I will be.”

they would have been influenced by a popular view of the nature of deity as propagated in their environment.²⁰⁴

Rather than look solely to the LXX translation of Exodus 3:14 for meaning of the divine name, we should consider its historical context, give attention to the likely meaning of the Hebrew text, evaluate other Greek translations and understandings of it (such as those given by Aquila, Theodotion, and Clement of Alexandria), and then look to the rest of the Bible to give us a more complete understanding of the name, as we appear to have in Revelation 1:4, 8. If we do this, then our understanding of Jah’s name will be one that is not only more accurate, but it will be one that brings us closer to the one whose name has been kept from so many for far too long, and for no good reasons at all.

If the divine name was removed from Revelation 1:4, for which a grammatical argument can be made, then it may be that what is there said about God as the *ho on* was also influenced by the same philosophy that appears to have infected the LXX translators of Exodus 3:14. Such thinking is likely also what led to a later Trinitarian view of the biblical “one God,” a view that, as I will show in Chapter 2, is not based on any good reasons, just as the refusal to use or to pronounce the name of the biblical God are also practiced today without any good reasons at all.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has been written to defend the use of “Jehovah” by Jehovah’s Witnesses and others, and to show that there are no legitimate reasons whatsoever for anyone who expresses faith in

²⁰⁴ Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” page 43. Alexander MacWhorter, “Jehovah Considered as a Memorial Name,” *BSac* 14 (1857), page 111, with direct reference to Exodus 3:14 asks, “May not the Septuagint have given us, instead of the historical YAHVEH, God of the Scriptures, the philosophical Θεός, or ‘God,’ of Plato, and the school of Alexandria?” Also, L.M. Pákozdy, “I shall be that which I shall be,” *BT* 7.4 (October 1956), page 147, observes, “The translation ‘I am that I am’ is weakened by its very origin which appears in the LXX and betrays obviously the influence of Hellenistic philosophy of religion with its central idea of the deity as the absolutely independent Being.”

the biblical God to, at the same time, fail or refuse to pronounce or use his name. The best available evidence shows that “Jehovah” is not the result of a scribal application of vowel points from the Hebrew word for “Lord” to the tetragrammaton, the four-letter form of the divine name (יהוה [YHWH]). The best evidence for the pronunciation of the divine name shows us that “Yahweh” is an inaccurate transliteration based on very weak evidence relating to a reported Samaritan pronunciation preserved through Greek sources that explicitly contrasts it with the reported Jewish pronunciation (in Greek, *Ia*), which comes from the two-letter form of the divine name in Hebrew, *Yah* (יה [YH]). In English this form is Anglicized as “Jah.”

“Jah” is both a stand-alone name for the biblical God and it is used as part of other proper names in- and outside of the Bible. “Jah” also appears in the Greek text of Revelation 19 four times as part of the expression, “Praise Jah!” The Christian Witnesses of Jah accept “Jah” as the least disputed form and pronunciation of all forms of the divine name. But the pronunciations “Jehovah” and “Jaho,” and even certain variations of these forms, are also appropriate for they are also based on good reasons. Though there are always certain limitations when it comes to representing one or more letters or sounds from one language into another, exact correspondence between names in Hebrew, Greek, or in other languages is not something the Bible itself requires of those who would praise God’s name. The best available evidence is enough, and when it is considered then “Yahweh” does not measure up in any meaningful way to the forms *Ye/aho/uwah*, *Ye/aho/u*, or *Yah*. These forms are appropriately represented in English, respectively, as “Jehovah” (or “Jehuvah,” “Jahovah” or “Jahuvah”), “Jaho” (or “Jehu,” “Jeho” or “Jahu”), and “Jah.”

While “Jah” clearly represents a unique name of the biblical God, the four-letter form of the divine name represented frequently today as “Jehovah,” in English, may also simply be another way of representing the three-letter form of the divine name that occurs as part of biblical names and which stands alone in ancient Aramaic, Jewish papyri. The three-letter form of the divine name (יה [YHW]) is also represented in ancient historical and biblical texts by the Greek transliteration *Iao*, which is itself used in several early

historical, onomastic, and other sources as the name of the Jewish God. Further, Jerome (see page 41, note 63) wrote that the four-letter form of the divine name is properly pronounced as “Iaho,” which corresponds to the Greek transliteration *Iao* and to the three-letter Hebrew/Aramaic form of the divine name. But since today “Jaho” is not as well represented as “Jehovah” or “Jah,” it is time to give it a more enduring place among the possible pronunciations of the biblical God’s name, based as it is on good, if not the best, available evidence.

Use of the divine name in the text of the Bible is incontestable when it comes to the OT, and there are good reasons for believing that the NT writers used the divine name when they quoted OT divine-name-containing texts, and possibly even when they did not (Revelation 1:4). God’s name is definitely used four times in Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6. Its apparent replacement by Christian scribes with sacred name abbreviations known as *nomina sacra* (for example, $\overline{\kappa\varsigma}$, for the Greek word for “Lord”) is consistent with the use of similar, apparently Jewish abbreviations (like the double *yod* in P.Oxy. vii. 1007 with a line through it [$\overline{\text{Y Y}}$]). Yet, both surrogates avoid use of the name in a manner consistent with Greek philosophical beliefs found in Philo, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and others, all of whom present unbiblical views about God and his name.—Psalm 44:20.

Though there are no good reasons supporting non-use of a form of the divine name in translations of the OT, many today still argue that (Revelation 19 aside) the earliest available NT manuscripts are in fact the best available evidence, and they support the use of “Lord” or “God” (whether abbreviated sacredly or not) in the NT today. But this belief often ignores significant historical facts regarding the use and subsequent removal of the divine name from Greek OT texts sometime after the first century CE. The evidence shows that this took place during the very same time when the earliest available NT documents were being copied and transmitted. This makes the earlier Greek OT manuscript evidence available today *better* for our use in determining what the original NT writers originally used. There are good reasons for believing that those individuals or groups who surrogated the divine name in later OT Greek texts did the same thing (at least for

OT quotations) to the NT, all of which was apparently done for the same Greek philosophical reasons. But these are not good reasons for believing that the NT writers themselves began or continued a practice of surrogating the divine name when quoting OT divine-name-containing texts. Further, few if any translators today use anything like the sacred name abbreviations used in the earliest available NT manuscripts.

The NWT uses “Jehovah” not only in the OT but also in the NT in 237 instances. Some of these NT uses of the divine name do not have very good reasons supporting them, and in many of them it is not clear whether “Jehovah” of the OT is in fact the intended referent (for example, 1 Corinthians 7:17). Therefore, it can be said that the NWT Committee went too far in its use of the divine name in the NT. However, the NWT Committee has done far more than any other Bible translation when it comes to explaining the importance of using the divine name. It also uses the divine name in at least 79 and possibly even in as many as 93 or even 154 NT texts where there are good reasons to use it.

The meaning of God's name has also been clouded, in part because the name itself has been “concealed” in many respects from mankind by those who should have known better. While there are many meanings and attributes associated with the biblical God and with his name, the idea of ‘becoming’ something toward those who are his people, particularly in their time of need, is taught in the account involving Moses and Jah in Exodus 3:14. This idea also appears to be expressed in the verbs that communicate God's having ‘been,’ his ‘being,’ and his ‘coming’ to his people in Revelation 1:4, 8. It is just such texts that give hope to those who worship Jah today apart from the traditions of men, traditions that invalidate Jah's Word, traditions that hide his name, and traditions that obscure the meaning of his name.—Mark 7:13.

But it is not only the use, pronunciation, and meaning of the name that has been controversial for no good reasons, for more than a couple thousand years. Indeed, the identity, even the very nature of Jah God has been misrepresented by many scholars and critics of Jehovah's Witnesses for far too long. So as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, as a Christian Witness of Jah, I now turn to a defense of the biblical God Jah's nature and his identity.

2

“One God, the Father”

In this chapter I will provide my defense of the biblical teaching and of Jehovah’s Witnesses that “to us there is one God, the Father” (1 Corinthians 8:6). While belief in this “one God” based on explicit texts such as the one quoted above seems simple enough, the meaning of “one God” and the understanding of the identity and the nature of “the Father” have become far more complicated than one might expect, that is, after reading the Old or the New Testaments (hereafter, OT and NT, respectively). In the NT, when the description “one God” is further defined it is always, only “the Father.” It is never, “one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” as we find commonly spoken of and taught by Trinitarians today.

Consider again the text from 1 Corinthians concerning the “one God,” as well as another passage from the writings of Paul that speaks of this same God, the “one God.” Notice how this “God” is presented relative to Jesus in both texts:

1 Corinthians 8:6 (NWT)

[T]here is actually to us one God the Father, out of whom all things are, and we for him; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are, and we through him.

Ephesians 4:4-6 (NWT)

One body there is, and one spirit, even as YOU were called in the one hope to which YOU were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all [persons], who is over all and through all and in all.

If based on the above the Father is accepted as the “one God,” then Christians could discuss further the issues having to do with

the identity and nature of other heavenly beings presented to us by the Bible, and thus have a proper perspective on how these relate to or associate with the “one God.” Yet, as noted above, Christendom has for some time now extended the definition of the “one God” from “the Father” to “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” This belief, known as the Trinity, defines the nature of the one God as ‘one *being*,’ not as one “person” (such as “the Father”), and the terms used in defining the nature of the “one God” are used in a special sense that is not found in or supported by the Bible. This I will show throughout this Chapter 2.

Against the Trinitarian definition of the “one God” is the biblical definition found in the two NT texts quoted on the previous page (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:4-6). In the NT, the “one God” is “the Father” with a very clear distinction made between this “one God” and the “one Lord, Jesus Christ.” There is never in the Bible any explicit identification of Jesus or the Holy Spirit as the “one God,” such as we find to be true with the Father. What, though, about Jesus as the “one Lord”? Does such an exclusive identification provide a model of sorts for permitting the “one God” to involve more “persons” than the Father, since the Father is also “Lord”?—Acts 17:24.

While no one made or caused the Father to become the “one God,” Jesus’ position as the “one Lord” of Christians *is* one he received from the Father. That is why in Acts 2:36 we are told, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled.” Also, we are taught that Jesus was given “all authority” and that God the Father (the “one God”) “exalted” Jesus to his position and place so that we might all confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”—Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11.

The identification of and the distinction between the “one God, the Father” and the “one Lord, Jesus Christ” is also presented to us together with a distinction between the two in terms of the “source” (Greek: *ek*) and the agent “through” whom (Greek: *dia*) “all things” were created (a distinction that is discussed further in Chapter 5). This is not the only text in the NT where the “one God” is distinguished as such from Jesus Christ. According to 1 Timothy 2:5, “there is one God, and one mediator

between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus.” Consider also Jesus’ prayer to the “Father” where he addressed him as, “you, the only true God” (John 17:1-3). Even in the OT we find at least one reference to “one father that all of us have,” who is identified further as the “one God that has created us” (Malachi 2:10). Jesus himself identified this “one God” of the OT as his Father and even as Jah himself, the God whom the Jews claimed to worship: “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is *my Father* that glorifies me, *he who you say is your God*” (John 8:54 [emphasis added]). All of these texts are clearly presented and without much, if any, dispute as far as translation. Therefore, they constitute good reasons for the belief that the “one God” is indeed the Father, and the Father *alone*.

With this clear biblical teaching in mind, we need to find out in what sense others can be (if at all) identified in the Bible as “God,” “a god,” or “gods” without compromising the belief in the Father as the “one God.” In other words, since the Bible also clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is a “mighty God” and “a god” who was “with God,” and in some sense even ‘our God’ (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1, 2, 18; 20:28), then what does this mean for our understanding of the Father as the “one God”? How can the Father be the “one God” when others (such as his unique Son, the Word, and his other heavenly “sons” [see discussion below]) are also “God” or “gods” in the Bible?

In this chapter we are going to look at some of the reasoning and arguments presented by Trinitarians for including the Son and the Holy Spirit as “persons” of the “one God,” and whether their reasoning is based on the Bible or even on literature contemporary with it. If it is, then it should be considered and accepted relative to the good reasons supporting its teaching. If it is not, if it comes only from the writings of those who lived decades if not centuries after the end of the first century CE, and if the Trinity does in fact contradict what we do find presented in the Bible, then the Trinity should be rejected and the Father’s identify as the “one God” should be protected against any false teachings that distort his nature, his identity, or his name.

If the belief of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Christian Witnesses of Jah is correct, namely that the “one God” is the Father *only*, then we must also explain how and in what sense

others can be considered “God,” “a god,” or even Jah himself without redefining the biblical presentation of the “one God’s” nature or his identity. Many of the problems Jehovah’s Witnesses and Trinitarians have in communicating with one another involve a difficulty in accepting or in explaining some of the other party’s views and the reasons for them. Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, might be under the impression Trinitarians believe in “three gods,” while Trinitarians may think Witnesses believe Jesus is a “mere creature.” Neither of these views is correct.

Though I am a Christian Witness of Jah, and as such I believe the Trinity is a not an accurate teaching, I am not questioning the sincerity of Trinitarians or their motives. In fact, I happen to have a good relationship with many people who profess belief in the Trinity, and I understand *why* many of them believe the way they do. I simply do not agree the Trinity provides us the best model for understanding everything said about God in the Bible and that it contradicts what the Bible does teach.¹ I believe Trinitarians have been taught to view and to define words in a certain way, and I do not believe their “way” is

¹ When it comes to the “holy spirit,” the dispute is both about the personality of the holy spirit (that is, whether it is an impersonal or a personal being) and whether it belongs to the nature of the “one God” in a Trinitarian sense. I do not so much object to viewing the holy spirit as a person as I do its inclusion in a Trinitarian Godhead, from a biblical perspective. The question of the holy spirit’s personhood is open in my view, as the holy spirit is certainly personalized in that it ‘bears witness’ and is ‘sent’ by both the Father and by the Son (Joh 14:26; 15:26). Compare, however, Rom 8:16, “The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit,” which does not mean “our spirit” is an actual person separate from us. There are good reasons for believing the holy spirit in the NT is also the same “spirit of God” in the OT (Ex 31:3; 1Sam 10:10; Job 27:3), and that as such it is the ‘personalized’ expression of God actively manifested in some way beyond our full definition, as it is Jah’s power and presence. For an excellent discussion of the spirit of God in the OT, see Lloyd Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Tokyo, Japan: Seibunsha, 1972). Therefore, like most other Jehovah’s Witnesses, I do not usually capitalize “holy spirit” (unless I am representing the beliefs of others) because I do not believe the holy spirit is an actual person like the Father, like Jesus, or like an angel or a human. However, there are some texts where I would use “Holy Spirit,” and “Advocate,” such as in Joh 14:26 (See The Great Message online here: <http://christianwjah.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=translation>). This is because of the strong personal description of the actions of the holy spirit in the early years following Jesus’ death. Accepting the holy spirit as a real person does not validate what is untrue about Trinitarianism. Rather, it would only mean the holy spirit is like Jesus and like other spirit beings sent forth by Jah: distinct in both heavenly glory and as defined by their purpose in relation to the Father, the one who sends his spirits forth as he sent forth Jesus; the Father does “his works” through them both.—Joh 14:10-31; Heb 1:14.

helpful when it comes to acquiring an accurate view of God and of Jesus from the Bible. This can be better understood through a further discussion of key terms used and distinctions made by Trinitarians in expressing their beliefs about “one God.”

“Person” and “Being”

The Trinitarian distinction. Edmund J. Fortman and other Trinitarian scholars acknowledge that “most theologians no longer expect to find in the New Testament a formal trinitarianism.” But Fortman then quotes R.L. Richard’s view that “an elemental Trinitarianism” can be found in the “period of Christian origins,” and John L. McKenzie’s statement to the effect that the Bible’s use of the terms Father, Son, and Spirit are in harmony with “the elements of the trinity of persons.”²

It is absolutely essential for advocates of the Trinity doctrine to convince others that there is some (biblically supported) distinction between a “person” and a “being,” for where God is concerned there is only one *being* (God) but three *persons* (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Each of these “persons” is believed to share equally in the “being” of the “one God.” So when advocates of the Trinity doctrine claim that the “God worshiped by Trinitarians is the one and only God,”³ but then proceed to claim that three different “persons” are “fully God,”⁴ the term “person” is clearly being used differently from how we normally understand “person.” Since most “persons” are also individual ‘beings,’⁵ we could not today rightly use the term

² Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), page 291.

³ Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), page 12.

⁴ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 13.

⁵ Remarkably, Bowman (*Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 13) states, “People often assume that ‘person’ is used to refer to a separate individual being, which would imply that three divine persons were three Gods.” This seems to suggest that there really is no basis for claiming that a separate “person” is also a separate “being,” but that it is merely an ‘assumption.’ But it is no assumption at all. Rather, it is everywhere (except for abnormal situations, such as those involving Siamese twins [see discussion below]) demonstrated in our modern society! ‘Persons’ are also individual ‘beings.’ A ‘personality’ is viewed differently from a “being,” that is, as a part of it. But it is also viewed differently from a “person,” again, as something belonging to him

“person” for a human father and for his son without at the same time creating a distinction in terms of their “being” or essence: The human father and human son are not, and they can never under any circumstance be one human being. They are *always* two human beings *and* two persons because of the personal relationship they share and because one gave life to the other as a separate human existence, though of the same nature.

Further on this point, it is evident that both a human father and a human son have a unique personality or character as well as a separate will and thought process, though their will can be the same if one follows the other (compare John 6:38; 17:21). But the Bible does not use the terms “Father” and “Son” to communicate a “human” relationship for God and for his heavenly “Son” and “sons” (Job 38:7), for “God is a spirit” (John 4:24). Therefore, “Father” and “Son”/“sons” appropriately express the relationship that exists between Jah, Jesus and Jah’s other “sons,” because we also understand by experience this same kind of relationship.

Yet, this does not mean God could not have this relationship with his Son/sons apart from, for example, the equivalent of a human mother. Therefore, the understandings we associate with the terms “F/father” and “S/son,” both for spirit and for human relationships, must be consistent with what is actually *true* about those relationships. For humans, a father can only have a relationship with a son in a natural way by means of a woman (compare Genesis 4:1). The Bible nowhere suggests this is also true for God, though it does teach us that he has spirit “S/sons.”

We can accept analogous uses of these human terms by the Bible for God and for other spirits as long as that is in fact how the Bible presents and uses the terms. And it is! But the Bible also clearly teaches that “God is not a man” (Numbers 23:19). So, then, the lack of any expressed procreative teaching concerning God’s Fathering of his spirit Son or sons combined with the Bible’s denial of humanity to God provides good reasons for *not* carrying the human, father-son analogy too far. Therefore,

or her. The real question for Bowman and for other Trinitarians is, “Is there a different understanding for ‘person’ articulated in the Bible regarding the relationship between God the Father, his Son, and the holy spirit, than what we humans understand to be involved in a father-son relationship, and if so what are the differences and what are the similarities based on what the Bible teaches?”

let us look more closely at how Trinitarians understand and present their beliefs about the “persons” of the Father and the Son, and about the “being” (= the “one God”) they are said to share fully and equally.

Bowman claims there is “another sense of the word *person* that focuses not on separate existence but on relationship.” It is only in this sense, where a separation in terms of “being” or “existence” does not occur, that Bowman and other Trinitarians make a distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as distinct “persons.” These Trinitarians also admit, however, that the “one God” (the Trinity) may be described as a *person* in the sense of a separate being. Therefore, for Trinitarians “God may be described as ‘one person’ or as ‘three persons,’ depending on the meaning of ‘persons.’”⁶ So there are at least two understandings of “person” involved with the Trinity doctrine, but only one is consistent with how the term is actually used in the Bible and in the natural world (namely, a separate “person” = a separate “being”). A “person” or “being” may have a *personality* that is a part of his or her actual being. In *that* sense a “person” can be differentiated from a “being,” though all natural beings have only one personality or they are just one “person.” Hence, Paul speaks as he does in Galatians 3:20.

Trinitarians like Millard Erickson have adopted a definition for “person” that means “a *being-for*, a *knot of relationships*, an identity formed and completed on the basis of relationships with others.”⁷ Erickson then presents a series of analogies that really do not convey the essential ideas of Trinitarianism at all, except for perhaps one: Siamese twins.⁸ In the case of Siamese twins we do indeed have two different “persons” who at the same time share the same existence or “being.” Because of this, in one sense Siamese twins could be considered one human “being” but two distinct “persons.” This is the closest analogy I can think of for what Trinitarians *mean*, based on what they *say*. However, while Siamese twins do share the same existence of “being,” they do not each *fully* share the same essence. They do not, for example,

⁶ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, pages 13, 14.

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), page 233.

⁸ Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, pages 233-234.

share fully the same “brain matter.” So Siamese twins are not completely helpful in defending Trinitarianism, but their example is helpful in explaining by analogy some of the metaphysical claims of Trinitarians for the relationship between their “God” and that God’s three “persons.”

It could also be effectively argued that Siamese twins are really two human beings after all, that is, two beings who simply (by accident) share partially the same “being.” Related to this is another problem for the Trinity, namely, Siamese twins are not the natural presentation of man or woman made in “God’s image” (Genesis 1:26). If humans are made in the image of God then it would seem to be quite a reach for anyone to conclude that God is more like the Siamese twin phenomenon than he is like the majority of humans whose organisms are in no way essentially dependent upon each other. Finally, Siamese twins can *never*, under any circumstance, represent the relationship between a father and a son. Father-son relationships *always* involve a temporal distinction, and so the Siamese twin analogy cannot account for why one “person” of the Trinity is the “Father” and why the other is the “Son,” though it does give us some understanding by analogy to what it means to share the same essence of “being” with another “person.”

The more important question where it concerns the Trinity is whether what we have revealed to us in the Bible concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son contradicts Trinitarianism or agrees with it. If it contradicts what the Bible teaches, then the Trinitarian model for understanding God and the relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit should be rejected. Therefore, I will consider more about what is said in the Bible concerning the “one God” in the light of the arguments by Trinitarians for their view of “person” and “being.”

The Bible on God’s “Person” and “Being.” Another advocate of Trinitarianism says that when speaking about the Trinity it is correct to say that what is really being talked about is “one *what* and three *who*’s.” In other words: “The one *what* is the Being or essence of God; the three *who*’s are the Father, Son, and Spirit. We dare not mix up the *what*’s and *who*’s regarding the

Trinity.”⁹ Viewed in this way, the “one God” of the Bible is the “one *what*” and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three separate “persons,” the “three *who*’s.” However, such language cannot help but give the impression that the “one what” is impersonal, since it is distinct from those who are viewed personally (the three “*who*’s”). Yet, throughout the Bible “God” (White’s “one what”) speaks and acts like a “*who*”! There is no text, anywhere in the Bible, where “God” or the “one God” is presented as a “*what*” or as a ‘one what.’

Believers in the Trinity also frequently claim that its tenets are ultimately beyond our ability to grasp, and that it is “knowable only by revelation.”¹⁰ But from what source has it been ‘revealed’? Where does the Bible teach that “three ‘persons’ are one divine being”?¹¹ There is neither a single verse nor any collection of passages in the Bible that clearly teach that the “one God” is “three persons.” Further, there is also not any discussion or presentation in the Bible of the terms “person” and “being” that is consistent with Trinitarianism. In view of Fortman’s claim that the Trinity is a “revealed doctrine,” the question again arises: In what source has it been revealed?

Trinitarians, of course, believe that the Trinity doctrine is firmly rooted in the text of the Bible. Dr. James White goes so far as to say, “I cannot hold the Bible in my hand while denying the Trinity.”¹² Others, however, though supporting the view that the Trinity is consistent with biblical theology, recognize that “it is not clearly or explicitly taught anywhere in Scripture.”¹³ It is the significance of this latter observation as it relates to Trinitarians’ use of the terms “person” and “being” that I wish to highlight here, namely, the lack of any clear or explicit teaching in the Bible concerning “person” and “being” as these terms are understood and used by Trinitarians.

Most of the attempts to find the Trinitarian distinction between “person” and “being” in the Bible involve one or more

⁹ James White, *The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany, 1998), page 27.

¹⁰ Fortman, *The Triune God*, page 289. White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 28, also describes the Trinity as “a revealed truth.”

¹¹ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 14.

¹² White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 28.

¹³ Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, page 12.

assumptions that the Bible elsewhere contradicts. For example, after stating that the “the Trinity must be understood as fundamentally a society,” and that the “Godhead is a complex of persons,” Erickson claims that “God being love [1 John 4:8] virtually requires that he be more than one person.” He explains:

Love, to be love, must have both a subject and an object. Thus, if there were not multiplicity in the person of the Godhead, God could not really be love prior to this creation of other subjects. For love to be genuine, there must be someone whom God could love, and this would necessarily be more than mere narcissism.¹⁴

There are several problems with Erickson's reasoning:

- 1) **Erickson assumes that “genuine” love can only be demonstrated when more than one person is involved.** But nowhere does the Bible place this kind of limitation on genuine love and, what is more, the Bible reveals that we should have the same kind of “love” for ‘ourselves’ that we have for our “neighbor” (Luke 10:27). So it is possible, according to the Bible, to have the same kind of love for ourselves that we do for “others,” and this hardly involves “mere narcissism.” The love we have for our neighbor can be strong, genuine, and appropriate, and so can our love for ourselves. There is no biblical reason to believe that Jah in his perfection could not similarly or even in some greater sense show “genuine” love for himself.
- 2) **Erickson assumes that the statement “God is love” (1 John 4:8) means that this has been true throughout the eternal past.** Having already established under 1) above that “love” could have been an eternal attribute of God without his having to display love toward another “person,” it is also a fact that the Bible nowhere says that God must be viewed as having expressed “love” to another person throughout the eternal past in order for him to ‘be love.’ Furthermore, it can be argued that Jah's *desire and purpose* to share himself with others whom he had not yet made or met is another example of his love, and so love could also be eternal from this perspective without anyone but Jah existing at a particular time. If Jah's desire and purpose for others is eternal, then love

¹⁴ Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, page 221.

could also be eternally displayed by God through his eternal desire and purpose for others.

- 3) **Erickson’s argument assumes that perfect love only exists in the Trinitarian God.** He believes that our human “incompleteness” keeps us “outside of” each other, that it prevents us from fully identifying with the “thoughts and experiences of other persons,” and that it does not allow us to have a genuine understanding of others since we are “preoccupied with [our own] concerns.” But, again, there is no biblical articulation for this view of love. Erickson’s view assumes that God must be triune in “person” in order to express true love. His conclusion, ‘God could not really be love prior to his creation of other subjects unless he were more than one person,’ is also his premise and his argument is therefore circular: Erickson assumes his conclusion about love instead of first arguing from the Bible for his belief about “genuine love.”

Arguments from the Bible for a multiplicity of “persons” in a Trinitarian Godhead (and so also for a distinction between “person” and “being”) have been put forth by Trinitarians. For example, some argue that references to the plural form of the Hebrew word for “God” (*’elohim*) supports the Trinitarian view of three “persons.” Then there is the argument that the biblical reference to God as “one” (Deuteronomy 6:4) involves a ‘compound unity.’ Indeed, Dr. Robert Morey states that the Hebrew word for “one” (אֶחָד, *’echad*) “refers to a compound oneness in which a number of things together are described as ‘one.’” Remarkably, Dr. Morey further claims:

The use of אֶחָד [*’echad*] in Deut. 6:4 is exactly what Trinitarians expect to find in the Bible because it is the only way in the Hebrew language to indicate to the reader that God is a composite unity of several Persons and not just a solitary person. There are no other words in the Hebrew language by which such an idea could be expressed.¹⁵

The distance between Morey’s view and the true import of *’echad* in Deuteronomy 6:4 could not be greater. Morey creates a false analogy by comparing the use of *’echad* in eight other

¹⁵ Robert Morey, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Word Publishing, 1996), pages 88, 89.

verses which contain either a numerical plural or mention more than one item or person, with the use of *'echad* in Deuteronomy 6:4. For example, Morey refers to “the evening and the morning” as comprising the “first” or “one” day in Genesis 1:5. But, again, unlike Deuteronomy 6:4 we are here dealing with more than one item, namely, a “morning” *and* an “evening.” In Genesis 2:24 it is Adam *and* Eve (two human beings) who become “one flesh.” In Genesis 11:6 the *people* (= a group of persons) become “one.” A similar use of *'echad* is found in Genesis 34:16, 22.

Then there are the references in 2 Chronicles 30:12 (those in Judah are given “one heart”), Ezra 2:64 (the “congregation” is viewed as “one group”), and Jeremiah 32:39 (where the “people” are again given “one heart”), all of which involve numerical plurals or an impersonal singular term denoting a group (“congregation”). But Trinitarians will not accept that *'elohim* (“God”) in Deuteronomy 6:4 is a numerical plural (= “Gods”) and “God” is a personal term (meaning it refers to an actual person) in the Bible whereas “congregation” is impersonal (= not a real person). So when Morey says that *'echad* in Deuteronomy 6:4 “is exactly what Trinitarians expect to find in the Bible because it is the only way in the Hebrew language to indicate to the reader that God is a composite unity of several Persons and not just a solitary person,” he is assuming his belief rather than arguing for it based on the best available evidence.

It is also of interest to note that Morey cites the use of “one” in Genesis 3:22 as though it supports his view of “compound oneness.” Morey even says that this verse speaks of “Adam and Eve becoming ‘one’ (אֶחָד) [*'echad*] with God.”¹⁶ Yet, Genesis 3:22 does not say anything about Adam and Eve becoming “‘one’ with God”! Indeed, the verse does not mention Eve at all, but only “the man” (*ha 'adam*). Morey is so intent on proving a “compound oneness” where the use of *'echad* for God and others is concerned that he even appears willing to add persons to the text in order to support his view! What is more, Genesis 3:22 does not even use *'echad* in reference to “the man,” but to God and those to whom he speaks, those whom the man has become “like” (note that *'echad* has the prefixed preposition אֶ [meaning

¹⁶ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 88.

“like” or “as”] before it). Morey’s claim¹⁷ that יָחִיד (*yachid*) would have to be used of God to disprove the Trinitarian view is entirely self-serving. The use of *’echad* in passages such as Isaiah 51:2 (“Abraham ... was *one* when I called him”) show clearly that *’echad* can be used of a single subject without implying any kind of “compound oneness.”

When it comes to the plural form of *’elohim* allegedly being consistent with Trinitarianism, those who believe this way fail to realize that intensive or “majestic” plurals are common in the Hebrew Bible. This is because a plural word form can be either a genuine plural (meaning there is more than one of the type of noun used) or an intensive plural.¹⁸ An example of a Hebrew intensive or majestic plural can be seen in Genesis 39:2, where the plural form of the Hebrew word for “master” or “lord” is used in reference to Potiphar. Here the plural form of the word for “lord” either means “masters” (which makes no sense since it follows a *singular* description in verse 2 [= Potiphar “the Egyptian”]), or it is an intensive, majestic plural.

The same type of majestic or intensive plural is also found with the use of *’elohim*. This Hebrew word is not only used in reference to Jah (Genesis 1:1), but it is also used of Moses (Exodus 7:1), the Philistine god Dagon (1 Samuel 5:7), Chemosh (Judges 11:24), and of others who are not multi-“personal” beings. That *’elohim* is not used in these texts as a numerical plural is also supported by the fact that the Greek LXX translates these Hebrew plurals with singular Greek terms, just as it always does for *’elohim* when it is used of Jah in the LXX.

The distinction Trinitarians make between a “person” and a “being” as it relates to the Trinity is simply not supported by the Bible. The Bible does not even imply such a distinction, let alone teach it explicitly. Rather, what it does teach shows us that the distinction between the Father and the Son is not merely one of

¹⁷ Morey, *The Trinity*, pages 87-88.

¹⁸ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), page 122, under 7.4.3a, states, “In this usage (sometimes called the *pluralis majestatis*) the referent is a singular individual, which is, however, so thoroughly characterized by the qualities of the noun that a plural is used.” H.W.F. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.E. Cowley, 2d Eng. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pages 398-399, refers to this as the ‘plural of excellence or majesty.’

“person.” In addition to the fact that a personal difference always naturally involves a difference in “being,” texts like Hebrews 1:3 teach clearly that the Son is the “copy” (Greek: *charakter*) of God’s “being” (Greek: *hypostasis*) and the “reflection” (Greek: *apaugasma*) of God’s “glory” (Greek: *doxa*). The Father and the Son may therefore have the same kind of nature (that is, they are both spirits [John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 15:45]), but they each have their own separate “being” since one is the “copy” of the other.

A plurality of “persons” within the “one God” is also not taught anywhere in the Bible. Erickson’s philosophical argument regarding God’s ability to express perfect love only if God is multi-“personal” is unfounded and flawed in several respects. Attempts to read a multiplicity of “persons” into the plural form of the Hebrew word for “G-god”¹⁹ (*’elohim*) also cannot be sustained by the evidence. Either the plural form *’elohim* is a real numerical plural meaning “G-gods” or it is an intensive plural designed to honor the subject relative to the meaning of the noun used. Even ardent supporters of the Trinity agree that “the plural form *elohim* for God in the Old Testament cannot be evidence of the Trinity.”²⁰

In light of this lack of evidence, how is it that Trinitarians can claim biblical support for their views? If, as many Trinitarians will admit, there is no explicit, formal statement of Trinitarianism in the Bible, why do Trinitarians confess what is not formally taught in the Bible and at the same time reject what *is* explicitly stated therein?—John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6.

The “One God” and the Bible

Meaning what you say. Of course, a Trinitarian will likely not admit to ‘rejecting’ the explicit biblical teaching that “there is to us one God, the Father.” Yet, it is easy to show that they do in fact reject this teaching by going beyond it to include the Son and the Holy Spirit in the being of the “one God.” Trinitarians

¹⁹ I will use “G-god” at times from here on in this book to cover the different senses associated with the Greek and Hebrew terms for this English word, which senses are sometimes distinguished in languages like English with capitalized and with lower case letters.

²⁰ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 49.

attempt to redefine the “one God” in this way by first trying to establish that “Jesus is God.” This is maintained as true in a context where a Trinitarian will also adamantly claim that there is “only one God” though, again, this “only one God” is not restricted by them to “the Father.” Consider how this argument is often presented in literature produced by some advocates of the Trinity doctrine.

Dr. James White presents the first foundational point informing Trinitarianism as the belief that there is “only one God.”²¹ As we discussed earlier, a Trinitarian’s “one God” is the Trinity, a triune being, a “one *what*.” Only by viewing the “one God” as “one *what*” can Trinitarians legitimately hold to a belief in one God and also accept “three personal distinctions within God.”²² For this to work, “person” or “personal” has to mean something other than an individual *being*. Therefore, a special, non-biblical understanding of the term “person” is used by Trinitarians to interpret the Bible’s use of words like “God,” “Father,” “Son,” and other terms applied to members of the Trinity. But problems arise quickly for Trinitarians if they are disallowed from bringing to the Bible these post-biblical understandings and if instead they are required to produce evidence from the Bible for their views.

In other words, if Trinitarians are not allowed to assume Trinitarianism then it is not possible for them to defend Trinitarianism by using only the Bible itself. Every time Trinitarians say there is “only one God” *they are assuming Trinitarianism*, since only in Trinitarianism is that “one God” the Trinity. The Bible does not present the “one God” as a Trinity. It presents him as “the Father.” So how is it, then, that Trinitarians can claim that Jesus, or the Father, or the Holy Spirit *is God* if their “one God” is the Trinity? They do so by wrongly assuming that the “one God” is, in fact, the Trinity and then by also using the word “God” in another sense but for a “person” of the Trinity! Neither of these uses of “God” is taught or expressed anywhere in the Bible.

²¹ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 28.

²² Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 13.

The reality, then, is that when Trinitarians talk in either of these two ways about “God” they are not simply using the term in ways that are foreign to the Bible, but because their use of terms is not clear by what they say then what they say cannot always be trusted to express exactly what they *mean*. Usually, in fact I would say *always*, one must get the Trinitarian to articulate his or her view of “God” *each time* it is used in reference to a biblical text. Why? Because when Trinitarians say, “Jesus is God,” what they say *must be qualified or explained* or you may not fully understand what they *mean*. Once you hold the Trinitarian accountable for his or her language, and the meaning they attach to it, then you can effectively evaluate what they say, knowing now what they really *mean*. Simply take their words, note the meaning *they* give to them, and then compare these with what is written in the Bible. Always remember: Trinitarians talk and use terms like “God” in reference to the Bible *as if that is also how the Bible speaks or uses the same terms*. But this is not true.

For example, when Trinitarians say, ‘there is only one God,’ they are using the term “God” in reference to the Trinity itself. But the Bible cannot be used to show that “God” is *ever* used in this way! So we cannot simply accept the words of Trinitarians as if they are biblical the way they are used, even if they *are* biblical words. The concepts associated with the words used by Trinitarians are more important when it comes to determining whether the meanings they give to biblical words are in fact biblical. Further on this point, when Trinitarians say “Jesus is God” they do not mean that Jesus is the Trinity. Yet, again, they claim to believe in “only one God”!

Clearly, then, Trinitarians do not always mean what they say because they say one thing (‘there is only one God’) but they mean something entirely different when they then apply the same term (“God”), which they say there is “only one,” also to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit but without claiming that any one of them is the “one God.” It is Trinitarians’ failure to argue for or qualify what they believe while discussing various passages that apply the Hebrew or Greek terms for “G-god” to the Father or to Jesus which often leads to confusion about the Trinity. I believe the reason they do not argue for or qualify each use of “God” based only on what is clearly taught in the Bible is

because the Trinity is *not* clearly taught in the Bible! That is why the Trinity must be assumed prior to discussing any biblical texts that actually use the word “God.” The assumption then simply informs each use of the term and the Trinity doctrine appears justified. But it is not, for while some of the words used by Trinitarians come from the Bible (“God,” “Father,” “Son,” and others) the meaning they associate with these and with other words does not.

Again, Trinitarians do not really believe the “Son” *is God*, anymore than they believe the “Father” *is God*, that is, where “God” is the “one God” or the “one *what*” (the Trinity). Yet, that is what they often say (“the Son is God,” “the Father is God”). What they *mean* is that each member of the Trinity is a divine “person” and so “God” only in this sense. But that is never how the Bible presents or describes the Father, the Son, or the holy spirit, nor is it how the Bible uses words for “G-god.” That is why the moment a Trinitarian begins to read and interpret biblical texts like John 1:1, for them it is not ever a question of whether there are two individual *beings* presented by John. *There cannot be two individual beings* because Trinitarianism does not permit it! Belief in the Trinity comes before the biblical text and Trinitarians simply redefine whatever biblical terms they need to so that the term *theos* (“G-god”) is always (positively) either the Trinity or a “person” of the Trinity.

By contrast, when Jehovah’s Witnesses come across terms in the Bible for “G-god,” we look within the Bible itself for an understanding of the identity of the two “G-gods” here presented so that we can understand how they are “with” each other in a biblical sense. If a particular use of “God” in the Bible is contextually shown to refer to the “Father,” we then accept what is clearly presented in the Bible itself, namely, the Father is the “one God” (1 Corinthians 8:6). If Jesus or the Word is called “G-god,” then we do not try to fit him in the “one God,” but we maintain their relationship “with” each other as *ho theos* and *theos*, respectively, just as John did (John 1:1). Therefore, for Jehovah’s Witnesses there is no assumption about who “God” is, but only an attempt to identify him as he is revealed to us in the Bible relative to others who are described in similar terms. This is the exact same model of interpretation that Jehovah’s Witnesses

use when explaining terms in other biblical accounts that are applied in an exclusive sense to one being but then applied in another, lesser but similar sense to someone else.

For example, when in John 8:39 the Jews refer to Abraham as “our father,” but then right away they also claim, “We have one Father, God” (John 8:41), Jehovah’s Witnesses accept that the Jews used the term “father” in two different but positive senses for two different *beings*. But only “one” is their “father” in the original, unique sense reserved for Jah. Now compare this interpretative model with how Trinitarians interpret texts such as John 1:1 (which text will be discussed further in Chapter 4). Here Trinitarians cannot have the Word existing “with” the “one God” since Trinitarians believe that the “one God” *is* the Trinity, not just one “person” of the Trinity. That is why *ho theos* in John 1:1b (“the Word was with God”) must be *reinterpreted* in light of the assumption of Trinitarianism. When this is done *ho theos* becomes, not “one God, the Father,” but ‘God the Father, the first person of the Trinity.’²³

Indeed, everywhere there is a reference to the Father or to the Son as *theos* in the Bible it cannot be taken to mean “God” or “god,” that is, as individual beings by Trinitarians. For them, such uses of *theos* must always mean “God the Father the first person of the Trinity” and “God the Son the second person of the Trinity,” respectively. That is why when it comes to passages like Titus 2:13 (see my Second Edition of this book, pages 161-164

²³ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), page 271, writes, “Each strand of the NT affords clear testimony that customarily θεός [*theos*], whether articular or anarthrous, refers to the trinitarian Father.” But the four lines of evidence Harris lists prove nothing about an NT use of *theos* for “the trinitarian Father.” Harris (Harris, *Jesus as God*, page 293) also states: “Although Jesus shares the divine essence fully and personally, he does not exhaust the category of Deity of the being of God. To use the distinction made in the Johannine Prologue, ὁ λόγος [‘the Word’] was θεός [*theos*] (1:1c) but ὁ θεός [‘God’] was not ὁ λόγος [‘the Word’] (cf. 1:1b).” Not only does Harris view the reference in Joh 1:1 to the Word as *theos* in terms of Trinitarianism, but he draws a distinction between the Word and “the category of Deity of the being of God.” Where does the Bible ever refer to “the category of Deity”? It does not. Still, Harris’ point in relation to *ho theos* of Joh 1:1b is significant. He states that Jesus “does not exhaust the category of Deity,” for “ὁ θεός was not ὁ λόγος.” But Harris had earlier argued that “there can be little doubt that ὁ θεός in 1:1b designates the Father” (Harris, *Jesus as God*, page 55). Does the Father, then, “exhaust the category of Deity”? As the “one God” and “the only true God” (Joh 17:3; 1Co 8:6), I argue that he does.

and 367-410), a Trinitarian who wishes to apply “the great God” to Jesus must take the description to mean that Jesus shares in the nature of the “one God,” since he himself is not “God” (= the Trinity). As for the reference to “God” in Titus 2:11, this too must be taken either as a reference to the Trinity or as a reference to one of the “persons” of the Trinity. Anywhere “God” is used in the Bible for the “one God” or for the Father, for the Son, or for the holy spirit, a Trinitarian must assume Trinitarianism in order to arrive at a Trinitarian understanding of “God.” The Bible itself does not give us this understanding in association with its use of words for “G-god.”

All of these Trinitarian assumptions not only have no basis in the Bible but they in fact contradict what the Bible does teach us about God. Further, they even lead to other problems where the personality of “God” is concerned. For example, Trinitarians such as Henry Krabbendam argue that “God is simultaneously *One Person* and *Three Persons*.” Krabbendam then explains that “in the traditional formulation the Oneness pertains to Essence, and the Threeness to Persons.” But why, then, does he say God is “*One Person*” if the “Oneness pertains to Essence,” not to “Persons,” as does the “Threeness”? It is partly because Krabbendam (and others) cannot effectively characterize the Oneness (the essence) as “impersonal,” since the Bible regularly uses “God” in reference to a real individual rather than for an impersonal substance.²⁴

Trinitarians are forced to conclude, “the interpretation of the One and the Three simply cannot be exhaustively comprehended.”²⁵ Yet, in this Trinitarians simply appeal to the incomprehensible as a convenient way of dismissing their revealed problems. Krabbendam is wrong in claiming those who do not believe in such interpretations must ultimately appeal to “intellect.”²⁶ Those who, like me, reject the Trinity often appeal

²⁴ But Trinitarians’ characterization of the “one God” often borders on the impersonal. Note, for example, Harris’ reference to “the category of Deity of the being of God” (see note 23 above) and White’s distinction between God as one “what” and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three “who’s” (see above, pages 134-135).

²⁵ Henry Krabbendam, “Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics,” *WTJ* 57.1 (1995), page 137.

²⁶ Krabbendam, “Cornelius Van Til,” page 137.

to the Bible as a basis for our saying that the Trinity is not what it teaches, and "God existing simultaneously as One Person and Three Persons" is not what is revealed in it to us. But if Krabbendam and other Trinitarians accepted our appeal to the Bible as a basis for rejecting the Trinity and for embracing belief in "one God, the Father," then they, too, would reject what they have already assumed to be true.

Saying what you mean. In Trinitarian theology there is a distinction maintained between the Father and the Son that has to do with their being the first and the second "persons" of a consubstantial (essence-sharing) Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the third "person" of this Trinity. But this alleged distinction in "person" only is usually not apparent even in Trinitarian translations of Bible texts such as John 1:1. So what happens is Trinitarians simply substitute the "personal" terms they need for the ontological (= relating to one's nature) terms (like "God") that they can do without, that is, when such terms are applied to one of the three Trinitarian "persons" rather than to the Trinity (the "one God"). Even here there is confusion in some Trinitarian writings about how to refer to the Trinity, that is, as a personal "person" (as a "who") or as an impersonal "what" (recall Dr. White's "one what," for the Trinity).

If, however, the Trinitarian understanding of "person" came from the biblical text, then Trinitarians could simply point to, properly translate, and then interpret those places in the Bible that deal with this expressed understanding of "person" for the Father, for the Son, and for the Holy Spirit. But they do not do this because there is no place in the Bible where one will find their view of "person" expressed, nor will one find in the Bible the belief in "one God" that is three "persons." Instead, the Bible presents us with "one God" identified as one being, as one person, "the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:6). Because we do find this teaching in the Bible, and because we do not find in the Bible an expressed Trinitarianism or an understanding of "person" that is essential to it, Trinitarians frequently avoid saying what they really mean.

For example, Trinitarians will *say* "God" in John 1:1b is "the Father" (but not the Trinity, or another "person" of the Trinity), and because "Father" is a biblical term it "sounds" okay even to

non-Trinitarians. That is why many Witnesses and other non-Trinitarians will simply accept the Trinitarian’s identification of “God” in John 1:1b as the “the Father,” and then move quickly to the next point of discussion which usually involves the meaning of *theos* in 1:1c (for the Word). But if a Trinitarian is pressed to define “Father” further, and to explain how he or she is using the term (namely, for “the first person of a consubstantial Triad”), then right away it will become obvious that post-biblical thoughts and expressions are being introduced into the discussion, indeed, into the biblical text itself.

Therefore, it is not enough for a Trinitarian to simply show us that the Bible may use the words for “G-god” for one or more of the three Trinitarian “persons.” The Trinitarian must defend the understanding they give to “G-god” each time it is used for such persons, and in fact defend the very concept of “person” they claim is biblical. Given the significance of the Trinity and the extent to which it is advanced as true by those who worship it, nothing short of clear, biblical articulation of the doctrine will do. In other words, there is no point, really, in discussing only the grammatical implications of texts like John 1:1c when the meaning of *ho theos* in 1:1b is just as much if not more so in dispute! A Trinitarian will not be able to justify his or her understanding of “God” in 1:1b, and if he or she cannot do that then why should a non-Trinitarian spend so much time on 1:1c?

Essentially, what Trinitarians want others to believe is that when the Bible uses *theos* for Jesus or for any other “person” of the Trinity, then it means that that “person” shares fully in the nature of the “one God” (the Trinity). But why would anyone grant this meaning for *theos* to them simply because that is what they mean by what they say? If their meaning is not biblical, then it does not matter one bit that the words they speak are biblical. Once Trinitarians are held accountable for saying what they mean and for meaning what they say, then a student of the Bible will likely not accept the meaning a Trinitarian gives to the words all parties might accept as biblical (again, “God,” “Father,” “Son,” and others). We must look beyond the words used and focus on the meaning given to them, for only then will we see clearly that Trinitarians’ use of biblical words is not biblical.

More on who is assuming what, and why. As explained earlier, Trinitarians assume meanings for words like “God,” “Father,” “Son,” and for other terms used in the Bible in an attempt to justify their beliefs. Ironically, a little over a year after the release of the first edition of this book (1998), a review by Dr. White was published in the *Christian Research Journal*.²⁷ Cutting across the three-column, first page of this article, in big, bold letters are the words, **“Throughout his work, Stafford assumes Unitarianism is true in order to disprove Trinitarianism.”** Dr. White then proceeds to make a number of outrageous claims regarding the first edition of this book and about my approach to biblical theology.

For example, not only does White claim that I assume Unitarianism throughout my work (see below under “Logic, hermeneutics, and the Trinity”), but White also claims that I try “to prove that Jesus is not the Father”!²⁸ Consider the “error” that White believes permeates the “majority of the argumentation in [the first edition of this] book.” As quoted above, White believes I am intent on proving that Jesus is not the Father and inherent in this accusation is the idea that I somehow do not understand the Trinity. *That*, according to White, is why I argue the way I do. Indeed, White believes the points I make in this book are actually support for the *Trinitarian* distinction between the Father and the Son (!) and that what I write does not disprove that Jesus is God. He writes:

Only by assuming that ‘God’ can refer only to the Father can one argue as Stafford does in almost every section of his book. But Christians have always recognized that the biblical doctrine of the Trinity teaches that the Son is a different Person than the Father, and that each Person has taken on different roles in the work of redemption. In light of historic Christian teaching, the arguments put forward by Stafford and the

²⁷ James White, “A Summary Critique: Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended,” *The Christian Research Journal* 21.2 (1999), pages 47-49.

²⁸ My more complete response to Dr. White’s article can be read online at www.elihubooks.com. See the Topical Index under “J,” “James White: Response to 1999 CRI ‘Summary Critique.’” See also my more recent article, “Dr. James White and the Assumptions of Trinitarianism Revisited,” *Watching the Ministry* (August 1, 2011), on the Elihu Books Blog (link: <http://eliubooks.blogspot.com>).

Watchtower writers can be seen for what they really are: arguments aimed at a straw man.²⁹

Yet, nowhere in my book or in any of my other writings or debates have I ever tried to prove that Jesus is not the Father when addressing the arguments of Trinitarians. That conclusion does result from many of the arguments that I put forth, because what I have shown is that the Son and the Father are *not the same God*. If they are not the same God, then of course Jesus is not the Father because the Father is the “one God.” I certainly do not and have not advanced any arguments that might suggest Trinitarians claim Jesus is the Father, and then attempt to disprove something that I know Trinitarians do not believe. It is White who has created a straw man rather than deal with the actual arguments I have presented, for the specific reasons that I present them. I do not assume that Greek or Hebrew words for “God” only apply to the Father. In fact, in the first two editions of this book I very clearly explained how Jesus can be considered “God,” or “a god,” according to the Bible. I also made clear the fact that Trinitarians do *not* believe that Jesus is the Father.³⁰

Why, then, does Dr. White write about my arguments in this way, which is so easily shown to be in error? I believe it is for the same reason he and other Trinitarians change the discussion from “G-god” to “person” in texts such as John 1:1: Trinitarians must change the words used, they must change the meaning of words, and at times they will even change the arguments of others so they can hide their weaker positions. Over and over again White assumes that any distinction between God and Jesus is a “personal” (Trinitarian) distinction *only*, and that these “persons” fully share the same “being,” that of the Trinity (White’s “one *what*”). But *these* distinctions and meanings are the assumptions informing White’s theology, and they have nothing to do with what is expressed in the Bible about the “one God.”

Since the Bible writers did not put any Trinitarian qualifications on their use of *theos* for Jesus or for the Father,

²⁹ White, “A Summary Critique,” page 47.

³⁰ See, for example, the First Edition of my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 1998), pages 180-181.

then we should first consider whether the biblical terms used ("God" or "god") conveyed a sense similar if not identical to that which they were commonly understood to have had when the NT documents were written, namely, an individual "God" or "god." The relationship between such G-gods may be new in terms of the revelation provided for us in the NT (for example, only in the NT is the Son revealed as an exact "copy" of the Father and as the "reflection" of God's glory [Hebrews 1:3]). Beyond this revelation and teaching, which can easily be isolated from the text of the NT, Christians should not venture beyond what is written when it comes to establishing required beliefs about the metaphysical relationships between Jah, his Son, and his other "sons."

The Trinitarian metaphysic of 'one God in three "persons"' is not expressed or taught anywhere in the Bible. Rather, it is contradicted by what the Bible does teach, and so the doctrine of the Trinity should be rejected. Christians today should properly caption the relationship between Jah the Father and Jesus of Nazareth as one involving a difference in their *being*, not simply in their "person" as it came to be understood by Trinitarians after the Bible was written (compare Micah 5:4; John 20:17; Ephesians 1:3, 17; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 3:4, 12). For Trinitarianism's view of "person" and for its understanding of "God" both to be biblical, they must actually be taught or expressed somewhere in the Bible, or at least be consistent with what the Bible explicitly teaches. But this is not true for either Trinitarians' use of "person" or for its uses of "G-god." Nowhere in the Bible is "God" used in reference to a 'Trinity of Persons.'

Instead what there are clearly expressed confessions of faith and doctrine that involve "one God, the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:6) and others who are "G-gods" because they are this one God's "Son" or "sons." God's S/sons either represent the "one God" of the Bible (the Father) or they represent themselves or some other "G-god" as "gods," as I will explain further later in this chapter. For the Trinity doctrine to survive biblical scrutiny it must use biblical terms ("God," "person," "Father," "Son," "firstborn," "only-begotten," and others) with special meanings that do not come from the Bible itself. Trinitarianism is itself nothing more than an assumed belief which contradicts what is

taught in the Bible about the “one God” (1 Corinthians 8:6), even though it takes full advantage of numerous biblical words.

Missing the point and misstating the argument. Some Trinitarian apologists and scholars frequently claim that Jehovah’s Witnesses misrepresent the Trinitarian view of God. To a certain extent, this has been true at times. But what must not go unnoticed is the fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses engage in an intense form of face-to-face evangelism where they meet with all sorts of views and opinions. There have been many times when I have had a Catholic or an Evangelical express faith in the Trinity in terms to me that would be considered misrepresenting and misleading by leaders in respected Catholic and Protestant denominations. In other words, many who believe in the Trinity themselves misrepresent the doctrine, or they do not believe what other Trinitarians would have them believe.

Indeed, even some who have written in defense of the Trinity frequently refer to the lack of clarity that exists in Christendom with respect to the Trinity doctrine. For example, Dr. White writes, “Most Christians do not understand what the term means and have only a vague idea of the reality it represents.”³¹ Is it any wonder, then, that Jehovah’s Witnesses (whose literature is written in large part to reach those whom they meet in their door-to-door ministry) have also spoken about the Trinity doctrine in terms that may not at times be considered accurate? Of course, to the extent that literature published by the Watchtower Society has attempted to refute the Trinity while at the same time not accurately representing Trinitarian sources, criticism of any such misrepresentation is warranted. It is wrong and misleading for any publication or for any member of the Watchtower Society to refer to Christendom’s Trinity as belief in “three gods.”³²

³¹ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 13.

³² “Reaching All Kinds of People in Modern-Day Athens,” *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1995, page 15, tells the story of a former Catholic who questioned the church’s teaching “that one God is three Gods.” But the article does not mention that while this may have been the distorted view of God as taught in a particular monastery, Catholics do not really believe in “three Gods.” Elsewhere, however, Watchtower literature does dispel the notion that the Trinity advances belief in three Gods. See “One God in Three?” *The Watchtower*, August 15, 1984, pages 27-28, and “Did the Early Church Teach that God is a Trinity?” *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1991, pages

It is also unfortunate and inexcusable for Christendom's scholars to misrepresent Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs, including misrepresenting their arguments against the Trinity. Consider this: After referring to John 20:17 and 2 Corinthians 1:3, one Watchtower publication reasons, "Since Jesus *had* a God, his Father, he could not at the same time *be* that God."³³ Robert Bowman, Jr. quotes this very sentence and responds with, "But again, trinitarians do not hold that Jesus is his Father."³⁴ Bowman here misrepresents the Watchtower Society's argument. Their published objection was that Jesus "had a God" which, apart from some clear articulation of some other kind of relationship, means that "he could not at the same time be that God." But Bowman changes the thrust of the Watchtower's objection to one that, based on his counterargument, would lead others to believe that the Society's argument was against the view that "Jesus is his Father." This is similar to Dr. White's misrepresentation of my arguments, for what both of these Trinitarians write in this regard is not true!

Bowman attacked an argument that the Watchtower booklet does not make in this instance. The Witnesses' argument does not have anything to do with Jesus being the Father. By responding to a phantom argument and by side-stepping the real objection, all the while assuming Trinitarianism, Bowman would have us believe that he succeeds not only in making the Witnesses' argument look like they are trying to prove something that Trinitarians reject in the first place (that Jesus is the Father), but Bowman also avoids having to deal with the real implications of the Witnesses' actual argument. Indeed, implicit in Bowman's reply is the Trinitarian view that Jesus is distinct from the Father as a "person," but not as "God." Yet, *that* is precisely the point of the Witnesses' argument: The Father is Jesus' God; therefore, they cannot be the same God!

The issue of different "persons" that Bowman brings up in his response to the Watchtower's *Trinity* booklet has nothing to

19-21, where on page 21 it is clearly stated that "it is said that there are not three Gods but only one God."

³³ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), page 17.

³⁴ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 72.

do with the Bible. It is merely an assumption that Trinitarians bring to it to avoid having to deal with arguments like those presented by Jehovah’s Witnesses and others. When a term like “God” is presented in an argument against Trinitarianism, a Trinitarian who is familiar with his or her beliefs will immediately redefine (perhaps even without realizing it, because of their indoctrination) the term so that it can be made to agree with the Trinity. After this is done, then the argument against the Trinity can easily become subject to the assumptions of Trinitarianism.

If, for example, a non-Trinitarian quotes a verse like 1 Corinthians 8:4, which says “there is no God but one,” then to a Trinitarian this use of “God” immediately becomes a reference to the Trinity, their “one God.” If the Trinitarian is presented with a text like 2 Corinthians 1:3, where we are told that the Father is Jesus’ God, then “God” here is no longer a reference to the Trinity but a reference to a “person” of the “one God,” who can then be said to be the “God of” another of the Trinity’s “persons” without contradicting the Trinity doctrine itself. But neither meaning for “God” (the Trinity or a “person” of the Trinity) is given to us in the Bible. Both understandings are merely assumptions Trinitarians use to interpret the Bible.

Indeed, Trinitarians like Bowman accept the post-biblical distinction between the Father and Son as Trinitarian “persons” and they ignore the fact that the Bible distinguishes these two in terms of *theos*, not in terms of “person” only. But that is not the extent to which Trinitarians read post-biblical concepts back into the biblical text. They also create a false dichotomy between Jesus’ human nature and his divine nature, both of which he is said to have at the same time even if it means he possesses conflicting sets of attributes sufficient to define a distinct person!

In other words, we regularly distinguish people from each other based on our individual attributes, such as by the extent of our knowledge. In the Bible this distinction is also apparent for Jesus taught, “Concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36). Yet, according to Trinitarianism, because Jesus has both a human and a divine nature, at the same time and as the same person, he both knows all things and he

does *not* know all things, and so because of this he can say “nor the Son” when it comes to what he does not know.

Here again, though, the assumptions of Trinitarianism come screaming through to contradict what the Bible plainly teaches about a distinction among individual beings where it concerns what they ‘know’ or do not know. Further on this point, Trinitarians’ use of “person” for their two-natured Christ is even more interesting when you consider the fact that the other members of their Godhead do not share in Jesus’ human nature. This means that there is, even in Trinitarianism, some ontological distinction between Christ’s human nature and the nature of the other “persons” of the Trinitarian Godhead. But the human nature of Jesus has attributes that define personhood! So there is actually a double equivocation taking place when the word “person” is used for Jesus of Nazareth, in that it can be used of his divine “person” (= one who shares fully in the essence of the Trinity) and of his human “person” (which does not involve a sharing of the triune being’s nature) and yet he is supposed by Trinitarians to be, at all times, only one “person”!

It is no wonder, then, that many Trinitarians reach a point in the discussion where they acknowledge that their view of God is not entirely comprehensible. Trinitarianism is a theological mess that has no business being associated with Jah or with Jesus or with the holy spirit of God. It has done little more than confuse people for centuries about God’s identity, his nature, his name, and even where it concerns the meaning of his name, as I explained in Chapter 1 and in this chapter where it concerns the use of “I AM” as an alleged name for God. The theology of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Christian Witnesses of Jah does none of these things! In fact, our theology promotes a clear, biblical view of all of these without having to use the incomprehensible yet biblical “depths of God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge” (Romans 11:33) as an excuse for why our beliefs contradict what is otherwise clearly taught about the “one God,” namely, that he is “the Father.”—1 Corinthians 8:6.

Logic, hermeneutics, and the Trinity. Some of the arguments presented by Trinitarians take the form of a logical syllogism. A syllogism is a deductive argument consisting of two premises and one conclusion. A deductive argument is an

argument where the premises are claimed to support the conclusion in such a way that if they (the premises) are accepted as true, then it is impossible for the conclusion to be false. Premises are statements that set forth the evidence of the argument. Consider the following example:

Premise #1: Creatures with claws are all birds;
 Premise #2: all cats have claws;
 Conclusion: therefore, all cats are birds.

Only if we accept the two premises as true is it impossible for the conclusion to be false. Therefore, from a structural point of view, the above argument is *valid*. However, the first premise is certainly not true (that is, creatures with claws are *not* all birds) and if de-clawed cats are considered then even premise two is not true. Logicians would therefore consider this argument *unsound*. This means that it is possible to have a structurally *valid* argument that is *unsound*, or where the premises are simply not true.

In a brief article about the deity of Jesus Christ,³⁵ Francis Beckwith quotes Isaiah 44:24 as follows: “Thus says Yahweh, your redeemer, he who formed you in the womb: I, myself, Yahweh, made all things, I *alone* spread the heavens. When I gave the earth shape, did anyone help me?” Beckwith then refers to John 1:3 which says (even in Beckwith’s translation) that all things were made “through” Christ, and then he refers to Colossians 1:16 where we read that all things were made “in,” “through,” and “for him [Christ].” Beckwith then reasons that “if Yahweh alone made all things, and if all things were made through Christ, it logically follows that Christ is in fact Yahweh.” Beckwith presents the following syllogism in support of his view:

Premise #1: Yahweh is the only one who participated in creation;
 Premise #2: Christ is one who participated in creation;
 Conclusion: Therefore, Christ is Yahweh.³⁶

³⁵ Francis J. Beckwith, “Of Logic and Lordship: The Validity of a Categorical Syllogism Supporting Christ’s Deity,” *JETS* 29.4 (1986), pages 429-430.

³⁶ Beckwith, “Of Logic and Lordship,” page 430.

One of the problems with Beckwith's logic here is that his syllogism does not reflect the teaching of the biblical texts on which he leans in constructing his argument. Beckwith's argument is structurally *valid*, which means that if we accept as true his premises that "Yahweh is the only one who participated in creation" and that "Christ is one who participated in creation," then we would have to conclude that "Christ is Yahweh." However, not only is Beckwith here concluding something that he does not really believe without qualification (that is to say, Beckwith actually believes Christ is a "person" *of* "Yahweh," and that "Yahweh" is the "one God" [= the Trinity]). But Beckwith's argument is *unsound* because it is based on false premises.

In Isaiah 44:24 Jah is referred to in an *active* sense: He "*made* all things"; he "*alone spread out* the heavens." No one "*helped*" him 'make' these things and no one assisted Jah in 'spreading out the heavens.' In John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 the prehuman Jesus is not presented as an active, co-equal participant in creation. Rather, as I will discuss further in Chapter 5, the Logos of God is presented in the Bible as the *passive* mediator of *God's* creative acts. It is God the Father "*alone*" who creates through his Son.

Exactly how this creation "through" or "by" the Son was done on a metaphysical level no one can say at this time. But we can say that there is a clear difference between the two based on the distinctions made in texts like 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, and in other, similar biblical texts that will be discussed in Chapter 5. But a difference is clearly presented to us in that one creates "through" the other and Beckwith ignores this difference completely in his syllogistic argument. Beckwith also confuses and combines Jah's active role in texts like Isaiah 44:24 with the Word's passive, mediatorial role under the general description of "participation." If Beckwith's intent was to present the meaning of the biblical texts he quotes as evidence in the form of premises, then his syllogism should have read:

- Premise #1: Jah "alone" is the one who made all things;
- Premise #2: The Logos is the passive agent through whom Jah "alone" made all things;

Conclusion: Therefore, the Logos is not Jah, who “alone” made all things.

In an attempt to reform logic (indeed, the whole of theology!) in light of the Trinity, Vern Poythress presents a number of Trinitarian assumptions, particularly in his explanation of John 1:1.³⁷ Yet, Poythress himself admits to the circularity of his own arguments: “Our observations involve circularity, of course. We rely on knowledge of the Trinity to arrive at a form of logic that prevents people from attacking the Trinity”; and, “The argument of this article is circular, in the sense that I use Trinitarian logic in order to argue for Trinitarian logic.”³⁸ So, there we have it, from a Trinitarian who is at least open and honest about what he is assuming (“knowledge of the Trinity”; “Trinitarian logic”), and why (to “prevent people from attacking the Trinity”; “in order to argue for Trinitarian logic”).

If we begin by assuming the validity of Trinitarianism as a means of interpreting what the Bible teaches, then everything we read will be interpreted in light of Trinitarianism! This is one reason why Trinitarians often have a difficult time understanding the arguments of non-Trinitarians, because they are conditioned by the assumptions informing Trinitarianism to interpret all that is said of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in a manner consistent with Trinitarianism. When they hear something that is not consistent with Trinitarianism, they object and reject it. In this way, Trinitarianism serves as a barrier against any good reasons from the Bible for belief in “one God, the Father.”

For example, in his book on the Trinity Dr. Robert Morey proudly acknowledges: “We gladly admit that we are beginning

³⁷ Vern S. Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til’s Idea of Analogy,” *WTJ* 57 (1995), pages 187-219. On page 188 Poythress begins his assumption of a Trinitarian model for interpreting John 1:1, claiming that this text describes the Word as “the Second Person of the Trinity.” On pages 189 and 192 Poythress claims that the word “was” (see my discussion of this verb in Chapter 5) means the “Word exists eternally.” On pages 190, 192-193 and 199 of his article, Poythress redefines the God with whom the Word existed as “God the Father” in a Trinitarian sense. Thus, instead of the Word existing “with God,” that is, with the “one God” (1Co 8:6), John 1:1b is made to teach that “the Word exists in association with God the Father,” which means they both ‘associate’ as “persons” of the one, Trinitarian God.

³⁸ Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic,” pages 212, 218.

with the Triune God as an *a priori* [presumed] truth for two very good reasons. First, this is where the Bible begins (Gen. 1:1) ... Second, the non-Christian begins with his own set of presuppositions.”³⁹ Morey's assertion here flies in the face of Paul's counsel to Timothy, “I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels to keep these things *without prejudgment, doing nothing according to a biased leaning*” (1 Timothy 5:21; emphasis added). Instead of trying to justify his assumptions in light of what he perceives to be other people's assumptions, Morey should have simply followed Paul's advice. But then he would not be able to ‘begin with the Triune God,’ and for two very bad reasons he is apparently unwilling to do that!

In 1 Timothy 5:21 Paul's teaching helps us to see that it is not true that all non-Trinitarians (Morey's ‘non-Christians’) must begin with the presupposition that the Trinity cannot be true. I myself would have no trouble at all accepting the Trinity as a biblical teaching, if in fact that is what the Bible expressly taught. But it does not teach the Trinity and what the Bible does teach us about God and about Jesus contradicts Trinitarianism. Morey also claims that after beginning with the Trinity as a “theological given,”⁴⁰ there are certain things one would expect to find. He writes: “If we go to the Bible and we do in fact find those very things which ‘must be’ in order for the Trinity ‘to be what it is,’ then we have all the proof we need that the Trinity doctrine is true.”⁴¹

The problem here is the same: By assuming something as true *before* coming to the Bible to find out what it teaches about God, then Morey can simply ignore whatever might disprove the assumed belief. The problematic texts can simply be redefined according to Trinitarians, and that is precisely what happens when Trinitarians use biblical words or interpret biblical texts. The assumed truth will always come out on top because it was believed and accepted *prior to* learning what the text actually teaches in its historical context.

³⁹ Morey, *The Trinity*, pages 7, 9.

⁴⁰ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 7.

⁴¹ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 18.

It is far more rewarding if we set aside any presuppositions we might have about what the Bible teaches, and go to the text looking for biblical beliefs. Morey disagrees, “While we can understand why the non-Christian would want to begin with [the belief that the Trinity is not true] as his *a priori*, why would a professing Christian want to start there as well?”⁴² But why begin with the belief that the Trinity is true *or* not true? Why not simply go to the text and learn about the biblical God from it? Why not simply accept what the Bible plainly teaches (namely, that “to us there is one God, the Father” [1 Corinthians 8:6]) and then build our beliefs on these clear confessions of faith and doctrine?

Indeed, if we begin by concerning ourselves with the defense of a certain doctrine, then we show that our concern is not so much for what God wants us to believe as it is with whether he wants us to believe what we already believe. In short, we end up telling God, or at least those who wrote the Bible, what is biblical! But the Bible is not the only collection of ancient documents that Trinitarians have interpreted by means of their assumed beliefs. Trinitarians have also targeted literature written before, during, and even after the NT was written in an effort to further justify their assumed beliefs.

Other Ancient Texts and the Trinity

In this section I will present several examples from three types of literature that some Trinitarians have referenced in an attempt to prove that their view of God and Jesus is consistent with the theology found in Jewish literature before, during, and after the NT was written. The three sources I will use to test Trinitarians’ claims are: 1) the Targums, 2) the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, and 3) the Dead Sea Scrolls. I believe that *some* Trinitarian scholars and writers have misrepresented these sources on several occasions in an attempt to justify their teachings. I emphasize the word “some” here because I do not believe that all or even most Trinitarians would make the kinds of claims that we are about to consider. However, since many have been misled by certain Trinitarian writers where these sources are

⁴² Morey, *The Trinity*, page 18.

concerned, the following discussion is necessary in the context of a defense of the biblical "one God."

The Targum of Isaiah 9:6-7. The Targums are a body of literature with an oral tradition of some length before finally being written down. The Targums are a collection of interpretive translations that attempt to make understandable the biblical books that were written in Hebrew. The Targums Onkelos and Jonathan were not written earlier than the second century CE. But the Job Targum from Qumran was written around the first century BCE. The language of the Targums is Aramaic, and all of the biblical books have Targums except the books of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, though these books do contain some Aramaic readings. Some Bible books, such as the Pentateuch (the five books attributed to Moses [Genesis to Deuteronomy]), have more than one Targum or Aramaic, interpretive translation.⁴³

According to Ron Rhodes, the Targum of Isaiah 9:6 proves ancient Jews considered the phrase "everlasting Father" as "a reference to the eternity of the Messiah."⁴⁴ Rhodes quotes J.F. Stenning's translation of the Targum here, namely, "His name has been called from of old, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

⁴³ For additional information on the Targums, see Pierre Grelot, *What Are The Targums? Select Texts*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992). See also "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial," 2nd ed. (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1990), page 307.

⁴⁴ Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1993), page 166. Rhodes prefers the translation "Father of eternity" and he concludes that the "phrase 'Father of eternity' in Isa 9:6 means ... Christ ... is an eternal being." But Rhodes here assumes a meaning for the Hebrew word עַד ('ad) in the phrase עַד אָבִי ('avi 'ad; NWT: "everlasting Father") in Isa 9:6. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon In Vertis Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), pages 679-680, explain that the word 'ad can mean "lasting future," "forever," "for all time," and they even give "eternal" as a description for the mountains in Hab 3:6 (עַד הָרִים, harrey 'ad). Obviously, the mountains were not eternal in the sense of having always existed! Yet that is what Rhodes would have us believe when it comes to the person spoken of in Isa 9:6. On page 680 of their *Lexicon*, Koehler and Baumgartner give "father for ever" as the proper understanding of Isa 9:6. In *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979), page 723, 'ad is understood in the sense of "booty" or "prey," which is then explained to mean "father (i.e. distributor) of booty" in Isa 9:6. This lexicon also notes the sense that most others give to this text, namely, "everlasting father." The LXX does not translate 'avi 'ad, though some manuscripts in the Greek OT tradition read, "Father of the age that is to be revealed" (see the footnote apparatus in J. Ziegler's *Isaias* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983]). The Latin tradition has the reading, *pater future saeculie* ("Father of future ages").

He who lives forever, the Anointed One (or Messiah), in whose days peace shall increase upon us.”⁴⁵ Robert Morey gives the following translation of this part of the Targum, “and his name will be called the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, existing forever, the Messiah ...”⁴⁶ What is so interesting about Morey’s translation is that he does not use *The Aramaic Bible* published by Michael Glazier, Inc., which Morey himself refers to as “the best translation available in English.”⁴⁷ Indeed, this “best translation” is very different from both Stenning’s (quoted by Rhodes) and from Morey’s translations of this Targumic text. It reads:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and *he will accept the law upon himself to keep it*, and his name will be called before the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, existing forever, “*The Messiah in whose days peace will increase upon us.*”

As Bruce Chilton states in his note to the above translation, “The distinction between the Messiah and God is made out clearly in the Targumic rendering of v. 6.”⁴⁸ Stenning’s translation of the Aramaic expression מן קדם (*min qedem*) as “from of old,” while Chilton’s translation shows that the “name” of the Messiah would be called *before* (that is, ‘in the presence’ or ‘in the sight of’⁴⁹) “the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, existing forever.”

Neither Rhodes nor Morey mention this alternative understanding of the Targum to their readers, which would show that there is nothing in the Targum to Isaiah 9:6 that in any way

⁴⁵ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 166 (underlining added).

⁴⁶ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 217 (underlining added).

⁴⁷ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 238, note 8.

⁴⁸ Bruce D. Chilton, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 11, *The Isaiah Targum* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987), page 21.

⁴⁹ Abundant Targumic examples where *qedem* is so used can be found in M.L. Klein, “The Preposition קדם (‘Before’): A Pseudo-Anti-Anthropomorphism in the Targums,” *JTS* 30 (1979), pages 502-507. The use of *min* before *qedem* in the Targum (as found in the text of A. Sperber, ed., *The Bible in Aramaic*, vol. 3 [Leiden: Brill, 1962], page 445) could mean “on account of” (see Klein, “The Preposition קדם [‘Before’],” page 505, note 7). This would then mean that the Messiah’s name is “called” *on account of* “the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, existing forever.”

supports Trinitarianism. In fact, Chilton's translation shows that the Targum actually *avoids* using the biblical titles "Wonderful Counselor," "Everlasting Father," "Mighty God" and "Prince of Peace" for the future Messiah! Still, though the NT does not quote or use language from this text for Jesus, the titles given to the Messiah in the biblical text of Isaiah 9:6 are quite in line with the NT teaching about Jesus as 'our God' (John 20:28), for he perfectly and exactly expresses the being and Godship of the "one God" (1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:3). Further, Jesus as the Son of God is enthroned by God to the "exalted" position of "Prince," and even as "King."—Philippians 2:9; Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21.

The titles given to the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6 do not support Trinitarianism in any sense, and in fact the use of "God" for the Messiah here contradicts Trinitarianism for there is nothing in this text to suggest that "Mighty God" means anything like the 'Mighty God the Son, the second person of the Trinity.' What Rhodes does is use just one translation of this Targum (the words of which are then simply interpreted according to the assumption of Trinitarianism), while Morey omits the preposition *qedem* (and *min* [see my note 49]) from his translation. The result is both Morey and Rhodes end up giving their readers an inaccurate view of the Isaiah Targum's presentation of the Messiah.

The Pseudepigrapha and the Trinity. The term "Pseudepigrapha" is used in reference to a collection of Jewish and Jewish-Christian documents that range in dates from around 200 BCE to 200 CE. But as Samuel Sandmel points out, there is "no such thing as a 'canon' of the Pseudepigrapha." He further writes, "Rather, there is an abundance of this scattered literature, some of it preserved in its entirety and some preserved in part, usually in translation rather than in the original Hebrew or Aramaic."⁵⁰

While much of this literature is useful in several respects that involve the study of the OT and the NT, there are also many ideas expressed in this literature that clearly go beyond what is taught in the Bible. Still, the question with which we are here

⁵⁰ Samuel Sandmel, "Foreword for Jews," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, James H. Charlesworth, ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), page xii.

concerned is whether or not in the Pseudepigrapha we find any clearly taught type of Trinitarianism. If we do, then even if the Trinity is ultimately found to be in conflict with biblical theology, its articulation could at least be said to come from a time prior to, during, or even shortly after the close of the NT canon. The times prior to or during the writing of the Bible would obviously be the most important, since if the Trinity doctrine could be found during these times then a better argument could be made for believing that Trinitarian thought and language may not have been entirely foreign to the Bible writers. But after reviewing the Pseudepigraphal writings, no such argument for Trinitarianism can be credibly made.

Dr. Robert Morey will disagree with my last statement in the above paragraph, because Morey believes the Pseudepigrapha does support Trinitarianism. For example, he cites the Psalms of Solomon 17:32 and 18:7.⁵¹ Morey highlights the fact that the reference here is not to “The Lord’s Messiah” but to (as Morey puts it), “‘the Lord Messiah’ because he is the LORD.”⁵² Remarkably, Morey then quotes Psalms of Solomon 18:5, “May God cleanse Israel for the day of mercy in blessing, for the appointed day when *his Messiah* will reign” (emphasis added). So while it is true that there is in this work a reference made to “the Lord Messiah,” it is also clear that this is *God’s* (= “his”) Messiah!

Additionally, Psalms of Solomon 18:7, after referring to “the Lord Messiah,” speaks of “his God.” Further, in 17:32 “the Lord Messiah” is said to have been “taught by God.” Clearly, then, there is no basis here for concluding that “the Lord Messiah” is a part of a triune God. Instead there are statements that support the belief that Jah is the Messiah’s God (compare Micah 5:4), that the Messiah belongs to God (compare Psalm 2), and (again) that the Messiah is taught by God (compare John 7:16-17). Morey does not give any of these facts from the Psalms of Solomon to his readers.

⁵¹ This is a collection of psalms and poems attributed to but not authored by Solomon, and it is dated by R.B. Wright (*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, pages 640-641) to between 125 BCE and the early first century CE. It also contains some Psalms that are not yet datable.

⁵² Morey, *The Trinity*, page 231.

In reference to 1 Enoch 48:2-6 and 62:7 Morey claims, "The Messiah pre-exists from all eternity before he comes to earth."⁵³ But neither in 1 Enoch 48:2-6 nor in 62:7 is any such claim made! Indeed, 1 Enoch 48:3 speaks about how the Son of Man was "named"⁵⁴ "before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars." Additionally, the Son of Man is here distinguished from the "Lord of Spirits." 1 Enoch 62:7 also says nothing about existing "from all eternity." It simply refers to the Son of man as concealed "from the beginning." Nowhere does 1 Enoch describe this period of creation as the 'beginning of time,'⁵⁵ and there is no mention at all here about the Messiah being "from all eternity."

Morey has apparently not considered that 'before the creation of the sun, moon, and stars' or "from the beginning" could be (and likely are) references to the beginning of the "days" of the physical creation recorded in Genesis 1 (note the reference to the "creation of the world" in 1 Enoch 48:6 and the reference to the "sun," "moon" and "stars" in 1 Enoch 48:3). Though 1 Enoch 48:6 states that the "Son of Man" was "concealed in the presence of (the Lord of the Spirits) prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity," here the words "for eternity" have to do with *future time*, not past time.⁵⁶ That is why George Schodde uses "to" before eternity ("to eternity"⁵⁷) and why R.H. Charles translates it as, "Before the creation of the

⁵³ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 233.

⁵⁴ This text will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

⁵⁵ See Chapter 5 for more about the meaning of "beginning" as it is used in Genesis 1, John 1, and elsewhere in the Bible. Morey's reference to 1 Enoch 46:1-2 as proof that the "Messiah pre-exists from all eternity before he comes to earth" (Morey, *The Trinity*, page 233) is a misreading and/or a misuse of a text to support a preconceived view. 1 Enoch 46:1-2 says nothing about the Messiah pre-existing "from all eternity." It speaks instead of one who is of ancient time (God [see note 46a in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, page 34]), and it tells of another "whose face was like that of a human being" and whose "countenance was full of grace like that of one among the holy angels." Thus, the "Son of Man" (verse 3) is here likened to the "holy angels."—Compare Gal 4:14.

⁵⁶ This is the translation of E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, page 35.

⁵⁷ George H. Schodde, *The Book of Enoch* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1882), page 127.

world and for evermore.”⁵⁸ Michael Knibb gives us a similar reading, “before the world was created, and for ever,” as does Matthew Black, “from everlasting and for ever.” Black also has a note in his text which says, “lit. ‘from the beginning of the world.’”⁵⁹

Morey also claims that “the fact that the Messiah is to be ‘praised upon the earth’ (1 Enoch 52:4) and we are to ‘worship’ him (1 Enoch 48:6) reveals that he is divine.”⁶⁰ Of course, Morey is here using “divine” in a sense consistent with Trinitarianism, which as we have seen is nowhere articulated in 1 Enoch. Regarding the “worship” 1 Enoch 48:5 says will be given before the Son of Man, Morey assumes this has to do with the same sense in which God is worshiped, rather than as homage due to a God-appointed ruler (discussed further in Chapter 5). That is why Schodde’s translation reads, “All who live upon the earth will fall down before him and bend the knee to him.”⁶¹

This is similar to the honor and “worship” that is given to Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11, which is the result of God’s exaltation of the Son “to the glory of God the Father.” Similarly, in 1 Enoch the Son of Man is “the Elect One [who] stands before the Lord of the Spirits” (1 Enoch 49:2, 4). He is not, however, the “Lord of Spirits” whom he stands before, nor is he the God for whose glory he is given honor and even worship that is approved by God the Father according to Philippians 2:9-11. Jesus is his God’s exact “copy,” and so the honor and worship he is given is appropriate since this would simply be another way of honoring and worshiping the Father, whose glory Jesus ‘reflects’ (Hebrews 1:3). As for being praised from the earth, while there is nothing in this which in any way leads us to Trinitarianism, the passage to which Morey refers is not even necessarily referring to the Messiah! 1 Enoch 52:3-4 reads:

⁵⁸ R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), page 216.

⁵⁹ Michael Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), page 134; Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), page 211.

⁶⁰ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 233.

⁶¹ Schodde, *The Book of Enoch*, page 126.

And I asked the angel who was going with me, saying, "What are these things which I have seen in secret?" And he said to me, "All these things which you have seen happen by the authority of his Messiah so that he may give orders and be praised upon the earth."⁶²

Even according to this translation the "his" in "his Messiah" could be the antecedent to the "he" in "he may give orders and be praised upon the earth." So we could either have here a reference to God or to "his Messiah," but in neither case does such 'praise' amount to a Trinitarian understanding of God. Praising Jesus is quite consistent with the NT and with the understanding of God found therein, namely, that "there is to us one God, the Father" who is also the God Jah of the OT and the God of Jesus, the Messiah.—Micah 5:4; John 8:54; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Revelation 3:12.

Morey's last reference to the Pseudepigrapha is significant both in terms of the facts that he leaves out of his discussion and also with respect to the Trinitarian "spin" he puts on the information he does provide. Morey refers to 3 Enoch 12:5, 48B:1(44), 48C:7, and 48D:1(90) as evidence for a "greater YHWH" and a "lesser YHWH," which he views as support for the doctrine of the Trinity. Morey further claims:

The biblical precedent for two YHWHs can be found in Genesis 19:24. Notice also that the second YHWH, while on earth, is "lesser" in rank than the first YHWH but this does not negate the fact that both of them are still YHWH. They are one in nature although separate in rank.⁶³

Morey here presents a classic example of how some Trinitarians will say one thing but mean something entirely different. He says that there is "biblical precedent for two YHWHs"! But does Morey actually believe in 'more than one' ("two") YHWH? No, he does not, as is clear from his discussion

⁶² E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," page 37. Compare Black's translation, "All these things which you have seen shall serve the dominion of his Anointed One, that he may be powerful and mighty on the earth" (*The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch*, page 52).

⁶³ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 234.

of Deuteronomy 6:4 considered earlier in this chapter. But Morey will apparently change his tune where it suits him and give his readers the impression that the references in the Pseudepigrapha, which he interprets as involving “two YHWHs,” support the later Trinitarian view of two *persons* (not “two YHWHs”), each of whom is considered YHWH but where there is still, always, only one YHWH, the Trinity.

After referring to the “two YHWHs” of 3 Enoch, Morey writes: “It is easy to see how John could believe that the Father and the Son were ‘one’ in nature (John 10:30) but separate in rank (John 14:28) because such an idea was perfectly *Jewish*.”⁶⁴ Here again Morey imports post-biblical Trinitarian views into the NT text of John 10:30 rather than consider how the NT and the Gospel of John present and articulate the relational use of “one” for Jesus, for his Father, and for others (see John 17:21-22). Instead, Morey tries to make it seem as if these references in John are actually drawing on existing Trinitarian ideas and concepts that can be found in Jewish literature of the first century CE (such as 3 Enoch 12:5, 48B:44, 48C:7, and 48D:[90]). But these very references contradict fundamental aspects of Trinitarianism by teaching, as Morey himself puts it, “two YHWHs”!

It is apparent that Morey’s presentation of issues surrounding Metatron’s identity as a “lesser YHWH” and of Metatron’s position relative to God is not balanced, and in fact it is misleading. Further evidence of this can be seen in Morey’s use of 3 Enoch 12:5. Here Metatron (the transformed, heavenly Enoch) is called “The lesser YHWH.” Yet, this very text refers to Exodus 23:21 (to which Morey also refers) where God says concerning the angel he sent to guide the Israelites, “My name is within him.” Notice that it is *God’s* name that is within *him* (= the angel). In other words, the name that God puts within the angel is not the angel’s name, but *God’s name*, which God bestows upon or places ‘within’ the angel. That is why he is called a *lesser* YHWH in 3 Enoch, for this angel (Metatron) is not viewed as YHWH’s equal. Indeed, Metatron’s nature and position relative to YHWH are revealed by 3 Enoch 10:3-6 as follows:

⁶⁴ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 234.

I have appointed Metatron my servant as a prince and a ruler over all the denizens of the heights, apart from the eight great, honored, and terrible princes who are called YHWH by the name of their King. Any angel and any prince who has anything to say in my presence should go before him and speak to him. Whatever he says to you in my name you must observe and do, because I have committed to him the Prince of Wisdom and the Prince of Understanding, to teach him the wisdom of those above and of those below, the wisdom of this world and of the world to come. Moreover I have put him in charge of all the stores of the palaces of the 'Arabot, and all the treasures that are in the heavenly heights [Isaac's translation].

From the above we learn that Metatron was "appointed" by God because he was God's "servant," his spokesman. Metatron does not speak in his own name. Instead he speaks in the name of YHWH, which is apparently what it means to have God's name 'within' him. YHWH had him instructed in "Wisdom" and "Understanding" and Metatron was also put in charge of the heavenly heights. We are also told that "eight" other princes are "called YHWH by the name of their King"! This is similar to 3 Enoch 30:1, which speaks of "the great princes who are called YHWH by the name of the Holy One." Indeed, in verse 2 the question is asked and answered: "How many princes are there? There are 72 princes of kingdoms in the world, not counting the Prince of the World"!

Clearly, then, one can be "called YHWH" or even viewed as a "lesser YHWH," without being equal to or "one in nature" with YHWH himself. Dr. Morey also refers to 3 Enoch 48C:7, where God says:

I bestowed on him some of my majesty, some of my magnificence, some of the splendor of my glory, which is on the throne of glory, and I called him by my name, "The lesser YHWH, Prince of the Divine Presence, knower of secrets." Every secret I have revealed to him in love, every mystery I have made known to him in uprightness.

There is nothing here about two "persons" being "one in nature." Rather, Metatron is entirely dependent on YHWH (not

on “the Father” as a “person” of a triune YHWH) for his glory, for his majesty, and for the secrets which he is permitted to reveal. YHWH calls Metatron by *his* name; it is not Metatron’s name, but YHWH’s name, by which he ‘calls’ Metatron. In 3 Enoch 48C:10 we are told that “Metatron stands and carries out every word and every utterance that issues from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be he, and executes the decree of the Holy One.” Metatron is not the “Holy One” himself, but his faithful and trusted “servant.”—3 Enoch 48C:1.

In view of all this evidence, it is surprising to find Morey referencing 3 Enoch 48D:(90), which speaks of Metatron as the “lesser YHWH, after the name of his Master, as it is written, ‘My name is within him.’” It is clear from a more complete reading of the book of 3 Enoch that being a “lesser YHWH” or being “called YHWH” does not have anything to do with being “one in nature” with YHWH. In fact, such a belief is *nowhere* expressed in 3 Enoch! That is why Dr. Morey has to read his Trinitarian assumptions back into this ancient document, for 3 Enoch itself is quite clear in its teaching: Metatron is a “lesser YHWH” because he is God’s servant in whom YHWH ‘put his name’ (compare 3 Enoch 48D:6-9), not because he is “one in nature” with YHWH himself in a Trinitarian sense. This is not unlike what we read in the NT concerning Jesus, the “servant” of the God in whose name he came and whose name he was “given.”—Micah 5:4; John 5:43; Acts 3:13; Philipians 2:9.

It may be that when reference is made to Jah ‘putting his name’ in one of his servants that the receiver’s name then somehow makes use of part of YHWH’s name (as in “Yahoel,” which figure evolved from one independent of Metatron to one identical to him⁶⁵). But it is also possible that YHWH himself was named “Metatron” and that he at some point gave this name to his approved servant.⁶⁶ However, the very text to which

⁶⁵ See P. Alexander, “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” *JJS* 28.2 (1977), page 161, under “1. YAHOEEL.” See also Chapter 1, page 40, note 59.

⁶⁶ The basis for this view is the listing of the seventy names given to Metatron in 3 Enoch 48D:1. 3 Enoch 48D:5 refers to these as “the seventy names—each of them like the sacred name on the chariot, engraved on the throne of glory—which the Holy One, blessed be he, took from his sacred name and bestowed on Metatron—seventy names by which the ministering angels address the King of the kings of kings in heaven above.” But it is also here said that Metatron’s seventy names are “like” the seventy

Morey refers (3 Enoch 48D:[90]) speaks of "YHWH," not as the name of Metatron, but as "the name of his Master." Therefore, again, the name YHWH is not original but given to Metatron.

A number of scholars have recognized similarities between what is said of Metatron and what is said of Michael the archangel. In the introduction to his translation of 3 Enoch, Alexander suggests that Metatron and Michael were actually at some point viewed as the same angel, with Michael being the angel's more common name and Metatron being "one of his esoteric, magical names." At some point "the connection between Metatron and Michael was obscured."⁶⁷ The Bible makes a similar connection between Jesus and Jah God (see Chapter 4), and between Jesus and Michael the archangel.⁶⁸ But

names of the Holy One, and that they are 'taken from his sacred name.' In 3 Enoch 3:1-3 R. Ishmael asks Metatron, "What is your name?" to which Metatron replies, "I have seventy names, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world, and all of them are based on the name of the King of the kings of kings." Note here that Metatron's names are "based on" the name of God. Alexander recognizes that "the natural interpretation of this would be that they are derived (by temurah, gematria, and other systems of letter and number magic) from the tetragram YHWH" (P. Alexander, "3 [Hebrew Apocalypse of] Enoch," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, page 257, note 2c.). But in view of 3 Enoch 48C:9 (where God says of Metatron, "I took seventy of my names and called him by them, so as to increase his honor") and 48D:5 (quoted above), there are good reasons to conclude that "Metatron" was not only the angel's name, but a secret name of God as well" (Alexander, "3 [Hebrew Apocalypse of] Enoch," page 158, note 2c.). Still, 3 Enoch 3 was not written by the author of 48C or 48D, and "Metatron" is *not* one of the seventy names given to God in 48B:1.

⁶⁷ P. Alexander, in his Introduction to 3 Enoch, "Theological Importance," pages 243-244 of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1. In "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," page 162, Alexander writes: "A proper estimate of Metatron must begin with the fact that he bears a striking resemblance to the archangel Michael. Both of these angels stand in a peculiar relationship to Israel as Israel's special heavenly advocate; both are High Priest of the heavenly tabernacle; both are chief of the angels; what is said in one text about Metatron is said in another about Michael, and *Metatron* appears as a manuscript variant for *Michael*."

⁶⁸ Jehovah's Witnesses believe the term "angel" can refer to a human or spirit being's function as a messenger for God *and* to a class of spirit beings in isolation from any humans because of their spirit nature (described in Heb 1:7 as "flame of fire"; compare Eze 1:7, 13; Rev 10:1). Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe the prehuman Jesus was ever 'just one of these angels,' but rather the *preeminent* spirit messenger and Son of God in age and in position ("Firstborn" Col 1:15-18; Heb 1:6). We do believe Jesus was and still is, functionally, an "angel" or "messenger" for the Father (compare Joh 7:17-18; 8:42). Jesus is also prophesied about as "an angel of great counsel" (LXX: *megalēs boulēs angelos*) in Isaiah 9:6, in the Greek LXX, which also uses "angel" to translate the Hebrew word *el* "G-god." See also Malachi 3:1, another prophecy about as Jesus as "the angel of the covenant" (*ho angelos tēs diathēkēs*). Jesus is described by

in neither case do these connections have anything to do with an expressed belief in a triune God, which is also true for the books of Enoch and other books of the Pseudepigrapha.

4Q246—The “Son of God” text from Qumran. The Dead Sea Scrolls have truly revolutionized the study of the Bible, and they have added a great deal of support for the reliability of OT and other ancient manuscripts. They also tell us quite a bit about some ancient Jewish beliefs about eschatology (the study of end-time events/biblical prophecies), legal regulations, and

Paul as by comparison “like an angel of God” (Gal 4:14 [*ōs angelon theou*]). As a spirit being, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Jesus is also the only archangel actually mentioned by name in the primarily accepted biblical texts, namely, “Michael.” The reasons for this identification include the fact that Jesus has “an archangel’s voice” according to the Bible (which he uses to raise the dead [1Th 4:16 (compare Joh 5:25)]). In this passage from 1 Thessalonians Jesus is also said to have a “commanding call,” which is a further description of this “archangel’s voice.” These two things, (“an archangel’s voice” and “a commanding call”) belong to and define Jesus as a real person, whereas the “trumpet” Jesus has in 1Th 4:16 is an inanimate object though it, too, is said to be a part of the resurrection process according to Paul in 1Th 4:14-17 (compare 1Co 15:52). That is why I associate the “call” and the “voice” of 1Th 4:16 with the “voice” of the Son of God in Joh 5:26, and why I also associate the “trumpet” here with the trumpet of 1Co 15:52: They are all part of the resurrection process, or they described the resurrection that takes place through Jesus, the one with the “archangel’s voice.” If Jesus is not an archangel or, rather, *the* archangel, then describing him as having “an archangel’s voice” has no clear application in this context. Also, in standing up for one of the nations of the earth (God’s people Israel) in opposition to the “princes” of other nations (Dan 10:20), Michael is described as “one of the foremost princes” (Dan 10:13). But out of all of these “foremost princes” only Michael is called “the great prince” who ‘stands on behalf of the sons of your people’ (Dan 12:1). It is also only Michael, and “no one” else, who is “holding strongly” with the other spirit being mentioned in Dan 10, and it is only Michael who is called “the prince of you people” (Dan 10:21). So while the Bible does not present Jesus as ‘a *mere* angel,’ it does present him as the foremost of their order and as their “ruler,” since the angels are his to command (compare the references to “his angels” and to “my [= Jesus] angel” in Rev 12:9 and Rev 22:16, respectively). This is consistent with Heb 1:5, which differentiates Jesus from the group of angels over whom he rules as God’s Son, as the archangel. Further, though Michael deferred to Jah when disputing with the Devil over Moses’ body (Jude 9), he was the one disputing with Satan and since that time Jah God has given Jesus “all authority ... in heaven and on the earth” (Matt 28:18). That is why since Jesus’ resurrection, and after Michael’s earlier encounter with the Devil regarding Moses’ body, Michael no longer defers to Jah but instead he “battled with the dragon” and defeated him (Rev 12:7-9). This historic conquest is an act truly befitting God’s Son, who “has become better than the angels, to the extent that he has inherited a name more excellent than theirs” (Heb 1:4). That “more excellent” name has been given to him through his exaltation by God the Father, so that now Jesus is King (Heb 1:8), having “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in lofty places.”—Php 2:9-11; Heb 1:3.

community rules. From these Scrolls we also learn much about various messianic concepts and ideas. Not only do the Scrolls have much to say about a "Messiah,"⁶⁹ but they even contain instances of unique terms and descriptions that are also found in the NT.

The Dead Sea Scrolls show clearly just how significant the Messiah was for some Jewish communities during that time. Indeed, 4Q521 talks about how the heavens and the earth will "listen to his [= God's] Messiah" (compare Matthew 28:18). The Davidic Messiah is referred to as a judicial figure (1Q28b 5:21-22; 4Q246 2:5-6 [compare Isaiah 11:3-9 and John 5:22]); he is associated with raising the dead (4Q521⁷⁰ [compare John 5:25-27, 30]); and he is even called the "Son of God" (4Q246). However, the Scrolls give no indication that those responsible for their composition believed anything remotely resembling a Trinitarian concept of God and of his Messiah, though some Trinitarians believe otherwise.

Consider, for example, the text preserved in 4Q246, which has come to be called the "Son of God" text because it refers to someone who "will be called son of God." This text has been the subject of great interest in studies related to the Scrolls and to the NT, and this is in no small part because of the text's close resemblance to what we read about Jesus in Luke 1:32-35.

⁶⁹ While I recognize that there are actual and potential references to prophetic, priestly, and royal messianic/anointed figures in the Scrolls, I am not convinced that there is a clear-cut presentation of two Messiahs in the literature from Qumran. See R.B. Laurin, "The Problem of Two Messiahs in the Qumran Scrolls," *RevQ* 13.4.1 (1963), page 41. Laurin shows that "the theory of two Messiahs in the Qumran Scrolls is really built on a tenuous interpretation of one text: *Rule of the Community* IX, 11 (35)" ("The Problem of Two Messiahs," page 52). Laurin points to the overwhelming evidence from the history of the word *mashiach* ("messiah") which in Jewish literature always seems to indicate the belief in but one Messiah from the line of David. Martin G. Abegg, Jr., "The Messiah at Qumran: Are We Still Seeing Double?" *DSD* 2.2 (1995), pages 125-144, provides an excellent summary of the issues, though he does not refer to Laurin's study and he leaves the door open for those who would object to the view that "messianic hopes were only or always singular" (page 144).

⁷⁰ This text and 4Q246 have some striking similarities with statements found in the NT. For a discussion of 4Q521 in relation to the expected activity of a prophetic Messiah, see Craig A. Evans, "Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran Cave 4," pages 96-97, in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

According to Florentino García Martínez’ translation, the second column of 4Q246 reads (with underlining added):

He will be called son of God, and they will call him son of the Most High. Like the sparks of a vision, so will their kingdom be; they will rule several years over the earth and crush everything; a people will crush another people, and a city another city. *Blank* Until the people of God arises and makes everyone rest from the sword. His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and all his paths in truth and uprigh[tness]. The earth (will be) in truth and all will make peace. The sword will cease in the earth, and all the cities will pay him homage. He is a great god among the gods (?). He will make war with him; he will place the peoples in his hand and cast away everyone before him. His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and all the abysses.⁷¹

As mentioned already, there has been a significant amount of discussion about this text in various books and in scholarly journals. Primarily, though, the discussion has been in relation to the title “son of God.” Some scholars argue that this figure is really not a Jewish figure at all, but a negative figure, the son of a Seleucid king who is conceived of as a world ruler in Akkadian prophecy. According to this view, 4Q246 is “Jewish counter-propaganda to Seleucid claims, turning the Mesopotamian prophecy genre against itself, and utilizing a powerful Israelite aversion to human claims to divinity.”⁷²

John Collins, however, has argued convincingly that such an interpretation is in error, and that 4Q246 more closely parallels thoughts expressed in the book of Daniel. As noted earlier, it is also parallel in some respects to the messianic prophecy in Luke 1:32, 35. Based on these parallels, it is more likely that 4Q246 should be “read as messianic.”⁷³

⁷¹ Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, trans. Wilfred G.E. Watson, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), page 138.

⁷² Edward M. Cooke, “4Q246,” *BBR* 5 (1995), pages 43-66.

⁷³ John J. Collins, “The Background of the ‘Son of God’ Text,” *BBR* 7 (1997), pages 51-62. See also Collins’ discussion of this text in his *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pages 154-172. Another researcher in this field who shares the

Setting aside the different interpretations for the “Son of God” figure in this text, I will here focus on the application of the expression “the great God” in column two, line seven. According to Dr. Morey, in his book on the Trinity all of the quotations from the Dead Sea Scrolls are from either Martínez’ translation of 1994 or from Eisenman and Wise’s text of 1993.⁷⁴ On page 230 of his book Morey quotes what appears to be Martínez’ translation of this text and then Morey concludes: “The deity of the Son of God is once again crystal clear. He is ‘a great God of gods.’” Morey does not consider the question of whether the reference in 4Q246 is to an individual or to the group of rulers mentioned in line two.⁷⁵

Above I wrote, “Morey quotes what appears to be Martinez’ translation of this text,” because Morey does not reference any particular translation when it comes to 4Q246, and the translation of this text in Eisenman and Wise reads much differently than Morey where it concerns the identity of this “great God.” Their translation reads, “As for the Great God, with His help he will make war.”⁷⁶ I can think of one good reason for why Morey did not use this particular translation of 4Q246: Eisenman and Wise *distinguish* “the Great God” from the subject of column two, namely, from the “Son of God”! So Morey has here avoided his preferred translation of the Scrolls so that he can more effectively inject Trinitarianism into them.

On page 173 I quoted Martínez’ translation of 4Q246, on which Morey here relies. Now I will re-quote the lines of his translation that are relevant to our discussion: “The sword will cease in the earth, and all the cities will pay him homage. He is a great god among the gods (?).” This is the text exactly as it is

messianic view of 4Q246 is Frank Moore Cross, “Notes on the Doctrine of the Two Messiahs at Qumran and the Extracanonical *Daniel Apocalypse* (4Q246),” pages 1-13, in *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (STDJ 20; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁷⁴ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 239, note 27.

⁷⁵ Some scholars interpret what is said in column two of 4Q246 in reference to a collective messiah, namely, “the people of God” who will “fight the final war and itself will gain everlasting reign” (Annette Steudel, “The Eternal Reign of the People of God—Collective Expectations in Qumran Texts [4Q246 and 1QM],” *RevQ* 17 [1996], page 519).

⁷⁶ Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (New York: Penguin, 1993), page 71.

translated in Martínez' 1996 edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and it reads the same in his 1994 edition. But notice how Morey presents Martínez' translation of the second sentence, “He is a great God of gods. ... His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom.”⁷⁷ Morey omits Martínez' use of “(?)” which Martínez placed right next to his translation! This shows that even Martínez was unsure about the reading and translation of this text.

Further on this point, back in 1992 Martínez wrote about the figure in 4Q246, though at the time he had only a partial reading of the text with only the words “great God” in line seven.⁷⁸ However, in an article published two years after the release of his 1994 English edition of the Scrolls, Martínez not only again put a “(?)” in the same place that he did in his earlier translation, but right after the “(?)” he writes in parentheses, “or: The great God will be his strength”!⁷⁹ Martínez now appears to be in full support of the translation that is found nearly everywhere else where this text is critically examined. In fact, in his recent “Study Edition” of the Dead Sea Scrolls the only translation he gives for this part of our subject text is, “the great God is his strength.”⁸⁰

The basis for this reading has been given by a number of scholars who have examined this text, and there appears to be no justification at all for the rendering found in some of Martínez' earlier works, which earlier reading is itself misquoted by Dr. Morey in his book.⁸¹ Morey also re-words Martínez' translation

⁷⁷ Morey, *The Trinity*, page 229.

⁷⁸ Florentino García Martínez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic* (STDJ 9; Leiden: Brill, 1992), pages 163-164. Notice, though, his reference to Fitzmyer's translation of line seven on page 167, “For the Great God is/has been with it/him, and He will now subject all enemies to it/him.”

⁷⁹ Florentino García Martínez, “Two Messianic Figures in the Qumran Texts,” page 26, in *Current Research and Technological Developments on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (STDJ 20; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁸⁰ Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 1, 1Q1-4Q273 (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

⁸¹ John J. Collins, “A Pre-Christian ‘Son of God’ Among the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *BR* 9.3 (June 1993), page 37, translates the text as, “the great God will be his patron.” This same translation is found in Cross, “Notes on the Doctrine of the Two Messiahs,” page 7. In J.A. Fitzmyer's article, “4Q246: The ‘Son of God’ Document from Qumran,” *Bib* 74.2 (1993), page 165, the text reads, “The great God is himself his might.” Cooke, “4Q246,” page 59, refers to a passage in the Hebrew Bible (Ex 18:4 [“the God of my Father is my help”]) which is similar to the Aramaic in column two, line seven of 4Q246, and he also points out that “Aramaic instances are common in the targumim, for example, *Tg. Onq.* Gen 21:20: ... ‘the command of the lord was his

to read, "He is a great God of gods," instead of providing what Martinez himself presented as the translation of the text, "He is a great God among the gods." So Morey has both misquoted *and* misrepresented Martinez, in at least two different ways, all apparently so he can read his Trinitarian theology back into the text of 4Q246. But if he is exposed and thus disallowed from abusing these texts in these ways, then it becomes clear Morey has no basis for claiming that the Trinity doctrine is taught in these Scrolls.

The Trinity is not a biblical teaching, and it contradicts what the Bible teaches and it even contradicts what other Jewish literature written during the same time teaches about God and about his Messiah. How, though, can we use the Bible to give us a model for understanding the "one God" together with other "gods," his own heavenly "sons," who are said to exist with and to serve him? Are we left only with theological models like the Trinity to help us make sense out of what the Bible teaches concerning the "one God" and those who are associated or identified with him?

Jesus, the "One God," and Other Gods

Do Jehovah's Witnesses 'deny the deity of the Christ'?

In Chapter 4 I will discuss in greater detail how Jesus of Nazareth is presented as both "God" and as "a god" in the Bible. Here I want to discuss the issue of whether Jehovah's Witnesses 'deny the deity of Christ.' The direct answer to this question has been given before in *The Watchtower*:

Jehovah's Witnesses do not deny Jesus' godship, or divinity. They accept what John 1:1 says of him, that he is 'a god.' However, the Church [in this context the Greek Orthodox Church] says that Jesus is not just a god but that he is the almighty God.⁸²

help.'" Cooke translates the text as, "The Great God is his/their help" (page 58). See also Steudel, "The Eternal Reign of the People of God," page 515.

⁸² "Religious Liberty Under Attack in Greece," *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1986, page 6.

The Watchtower magazine had earlier made this same point quite clear, “The fact is that Jehovah’s Witnesses recognize and accept that the Bible uses the designation ‘god’ with regard to Jesus. (John 1:1, 18)”⁸³ Clearly, those who claim that Jehovah’s Witnesses ‘deny the deity of Jesus Christ’ are either misinformed or they are using the term “deity” in a sense different from how the Witnesses understand Jesus to be a “deity.” But just who denies the real, biblical deity of Jesus? Indeed, which understanding of “deity” for Jesus is biblical in the first place?

If, as we have seen, the Trinitarian understanding of Jesus’ deity is not biblical, then Trinitarians are among those who deny the true, biblical deity of the heavenly Word, who became the man Jesus (John 1:1, 14). If Jehovah’s Witnesses are correct in understanding Jesus of Nazareth to be the Word of John 1:1 and so also “a god” who was “with God” in “the beginning” (which subject is discussed further in Chapter 4), then our understanding of both God and the Word should be respected, not rejected. Indeed, if what the Witnesses truly deny is *the Trinitarian understanding of Jesus’ deity*, then it is not fair to mislead others about what is really in dispute, even denied.

But what about the Bible’s repeated statements (considered in the next section) that ‘no other gods exist’ except Jah God himself? How can Jehovah’s Witnesses believe and teach others that the Word is “a god” who is “with God” if the Bible elsewhere teaches that there are no ‘other gods’ but the Father?—1 Corinthians 8:4, 6.

“Before me there was no God formed, and after me there continued to be none.” A fundamental precept of Trinitarianism is that the Bible teaches that “there is only one God.”⁸⁴ Jehovah’s Witnesses also believe this teaching. But Trinitarians further believe that the Bible calls the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit “God” and that because of this we should accept both that there is “only one God” (the Trinity) and that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are (“persons” of) God by ‘sharing fully the one Being of God.’⁸⁵ In this explanation of “God,” only these three “persons” are considered “God” in the

⁸³ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1976, page 640.

⁸⁴ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 28.

⁸⁵ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 29.

complete, biblical sense of the word. They alone share fully and equally the "one Being of God."

While there is indeed a unique association expressed in the Bible between the Father and the Son (compare, for example, Matthew 11:27), it is entirely unnecessary to assume Trinitarianism in order to understand what the Bible means when it teaches us about their relationship. Just because the Bible expressly teaches that "there is to us one God, the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:6) and that Jesus is "a god" or even 'our God' (John 1:1; 20:28) does not automatically mean that we must assume that they are the same God by being "persons" of a Trinity. Such an assumption is not necessary in order to understand the relationship between the Father and the holy angels in the Bible, angels who are at times also called "God" or even identified as Jah himself (see below). So unless there is a clearly expressed teaching in the Bible for understanding God as triune in "person" but singular in his "being," then our understanding of his relationship with others should come from what has been revealed to us in the Bible.

In this and in the next several sections I intend to show that the Bible itself provides us with the best model for understanding how "God" can be applied in a unique, singular sense for the "one God, the Father," and at the same time be used rightly for others who are "gods" because they are God's "sons." But these spirit "sons of God" are not "gods" only because they represent Jah or merely because they have divine authority, as was true in the case of Moses (Exodus 4:16; 7:1; Job 38:7).⁸⁶ Because these spirit beings bear a more natural association with the one God, because they are spirits like him, they are also divine by their nature, though they do not share the same "being" as God.⁸⁷ But before this

⁸⁶ Crispin Fletcher-Louis, "4Q374: A Discourse on the Sinai Tradition: The Deification of Moses and Early Christology," *DSD* 3.3 (1996), pages 236-252, challenges the theory that Philo's deification of Moses was a result of Hellenistic influence. He argues that, in fact, writers like Philo who deified Moses "were rooted in the biblical text (e.g. Exod. 7:1), but are also reusing and inculturating a fundamentally Jewish tradition which, since at least the second century BCE, conceived of Moses in angelomorphic/divine terms" (page 243). On page 252 Fletcher-Louis concludes, "If Moses could be [*elohim*], then, for the gospel writers, so could Jesus, who was regarded by the New Testament as at the very least a new Moses."

⁸⁷ Gal 4:8 is often misused by Trinitarians to prove that there are no gods other than the Trinity. For example, after rightly referring to Isa 45:21-22 as a challenge to idol gods, James White (*The Forgotten Trinity*, pages 37-38) refers to Gal 4:8 as

point is developed further I will attempt to answer the question about whether acknowledging that God’s sons are also “gods” in a biblical sense creates a contradiction with the biblical teaching that there are no other gods but Jah.

There are many cases in the Bible where the existence of only one God is asserted. For example, Isaiah 43:10 (NWT) says: “‘YOU are my witnesses,’ is the utterance of Jehovah, ‘even my servant whom I have chosen, in order that YOU may know and have faith in me, and that YOU may understand that I am the same One. Before me there was no God formed, and after me there continued to be none.’” In response to the question of how Jesus could be “a god” who was created by Jah when in Isaiah 43:10 Jah says “before me there was no God formed, and after me there continued to be none,” one issue of *The Watchtower* replied: “A sincere Bible student is helped by noting carefully the context of those words. The Almighty God Jehovah was contrasting himself with the man-made idols in nations surrounding Israel.”⁸⁸ This conclusion is based on good reasons, namely, actual references in the Bible to idols as “gods,” but whose real existence is then denied.

For example, Isaiah 2:6 speaks about the Israelites’ apostasy after they became like the Philistines and like “the children of foreigners.” Verse 8 continues the denunciation against Israel by speaking of the “valueless gods” that now fill their land, and how they bow down to “the work of one’s hands ... to that which one’s fingers made.” Then in verses 18 and 20 the “valueless gods” are again clearly in view, “In that day the earthling man will throw his worthless gods of silver and his valueless gods of gold that they had made for him to bow before to the shrewmice and to the bats.” In Isaiah 10:10-11 God’s judgment is again brought against

evidence that Paul refers to idols as “those that ‘by nature are no gods.’” But White then concludes, “A god other than Yahweh is, *by nature*, a ‘no god.’” Unless White is going to argue that the Galatians slaved for the angels who served God “when they did not know God,” then his general conclusion does not follow from Paul’s specific statement in Gal 4:8. Bowman’s handling of this text (*Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, pages 53-54) and of 1Co 10:20 is also rather interesting. In 1Co 10:19 Paul refers to idols as “nothing.” In other words, they are not the demons who use them in verse 20. But Bowman simply assumes that in Gal 4:8 Paul is also speaking about the demons, and not about the idols themselves.

⁸⁸ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1986, page 31. See also, “Of Which God Are You A Witness?” *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1964, Part Two, pages 115-118.

idol gods, "Whenever my hand has reached the kingdoms of the valueless god whose graven images are more than those at Jerusalem and at Samaria, will it not be that just as I shall have done to Samaria and to her valueless gods, even so I shall do to Jerusalem and to her idols?" Here the focus is again clearly on idols, 'carved images,' not on *any* possible "gods" inclusive of God's own heavenly "sons"!

Further on this point, in Chapter 19 Isaiah speaks against the "valueless gods" of Egypt (verses 1-3), and in Chapter 21 (verse 9) judgment is rendered against Babylon and her gods, "She has fallen! Babylon has fallen, and all the graven images of her gods he has broken to the earth!" In Isaiah Chapter 31, Jah appeals to his people by asking them to return and to "reject each one his valueless gods of silver and his valueless gods of gold, that your hands have made for yourselves as a sin" (verse 7). In Isaiah 36 the inability of the gods of those nations conquered by Assyria is highlighted (compare Isaiah 37:12), and in his prayer to Jah Hezekiah explains why these foreign nations were unable to protect their people from the Assyrians, "And there was a consigning of their gods to the fire, because they are no gods, but the workmanship of man's hands, wood and stone, so that they [the Assyrians] destroyed them."—Isaiah 37:19.

There are still more "good reasons" for viewing the 'formed gods' of Isaiah 43:10 as idols and not the angelic, "sons of God" who represent and who express the will of Jah God. Isaiah 41 records God's challenge to the gods of the "national groups," saying: "Tell the things that are to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods. ... Look! You are something nonexistent, and your achievement is nothing ... Look! All of them are something nonexistent. Their works are nothing. Their molten images are wind and unreality" (verses 1, 23, 24, 29). In Isaiah 42:8-9 Jah again makes known his superiority over "graven images," saying: "I am Jehovah. That is my name; and to no one else shall I give my own glory, neither my praise to graven images. The first things—here they have come, but new things I am telling out. Before they begin to spring up, I cause you people to hear them." Jah also warns those who are "putting trust in the carved image, those who are saying to a molten image: 'You are our gods.'"—Isaiah 42:17.

In view of the consistent condemnation of idol gods in Isaiah, it is understandable for us to view Isaiah 43:10 in the same light. There is nothing in the context of Isaiah 43:10 to suggest that Jah’s words should be taken in reference to anything but the idols of man. There is certainly no indication that what is said in this text applies to the heavenly beings who serve Jah and who are elsewhere in the Bible (see below) called or considered “God” or “gods”! No living god has been “formed” by the hands of idol worshippers, which is why Jah condemns the idols and those who ‘form’ them in Isaiah 44:8-10.⁸⁹ Again, the context of these texts shows us that the denials are directed against the lifeless idol gods of the nations, not against the sons of God’s heavenly court. In fact, Isaiah 43:10 uses the same verb for “form” that is used in Isaiah 44:10. Yehezkel Kaufmann, therefore, rightly concludes:

We are constrained to offer the embarrassing reply that nowhere in the Bible is the existence of gods denied, neither explicitly nor implicitly. Even the polemic of Second-Isaiah attacks the idols with no word at all for the gods.⁹⁰

The “Sons of God.” Evidence that spirit beings other than Jah were considered “gods” in some positive sense (and therefore not included in the biblical condemnation and denial of idol gods) can be seen in the Bible’s use of the Hebrew for “sons of.” In the Hebrew Bible when we read about the “sons of” a person, of a group, or of a thing the “sons” are accepted as belonging to or of the same class or type as the person, group, or thing of whom they are “sons.” For example, in 1 Kings 20:35 the “sons of the prophets” are “prophets.” In Nehemiah 12:28 the “sons of the singers” are “singers.” Further on this Semitic use of “son,” Gesenius writes:

There is another use of בֶּן [ben, ‘son’] or בָּנִי [beney, ‘sons’] to denote membership in a guild or society (or of a tribe, and any definite class). Thus בָּנֵי אֱלֹהִים [beney ’elohim, ‘sons of God’] בָּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים [beney ha- ’elohim, ‘sons of (the) God’] Gn 6:2, 4,

⁸⁹ See also Isa 44:11-20; compare Isa 42:8, 17; 45:18-20; 48:5. Regarding Deut 32:39, compare Deut 32:16, 21, 37, 38 (see also the latter part of note 106 below).

⁹⁰ Yehezkel Kaufmann, “The Bible and Mythological Polytheism,” *JBL* 70 (1951), page 196.

Jb 1:6, 2:1, 38:7 ... properly means not *sons of god(s)*, but beings of the class of אֱלֹהִים [*elohim*].⁹¹

With regard to this same use of “sons,” Gerald Cooke concludes that “the ‘sons of (the) God(s)’ are to be understood without question as lesser divine beings.”⁹² It is for this reason that we find texts such as Job 1:6 translated by some as, “The day arrived when the *gods* [emphasis added] come and present themselves before Yahweh.”⁹³ If the text of Deuteronomy 32:8 reads “sons of God,” then we have another instance where God is presented as delegating rulership of the nations to angelic “gods.”—Compare Daniel 10:13.

Some, however, favor the text of Deuteronomy as translated in the NWT and in other translations, namely, “sons of Israel.”⁹⁴ Sanders favors “sons of God”⁹⁵ and he highlights M. Lana’s observation that the reading of MT in Deuteronomy 32:8b “does not make good sense.” Sanders writes: “In the Hebrew Bible the expression בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל [‘sons of Israel’] always designates the people of Israel. The expression does not refer to a fixed number (מספר [‘number,’ as used in Deuteronomy 32:8b]) of sons of Jacob.”⁹⁶ Sanders notes the LXX and Qumran fragments 4QDtⁱ and 4QDt^j support the reading “sons of God.” He further observes that scholars view the reading of the [Masoretic Text] as an “adaptation of the older reading for theological reasons,” since “the older reading would have implied undue recognition of divine beings next to YHWH.”⁹⁷

The description “sons of God” is also given to the Israelites in Hosea 1:10. But here it has a much different meaning than

⁹¹ Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, page 418, sec. 128, V.

⁹² Gerald Cooke, “The Sons of (The) God(s),” ZAW 76 (1964), page 36. See also Matitiahu Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82,” HUCA 40-41 (1969-1970), note 9, pages 126-127.

⁹³ Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; New York: Doubleday, 1965). Also, Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, page 134, define *beney 'elohim* as “(individual) divine beings, gods.”

⁹⁴ See David E. Stevens, “Does Deuteronomy 32:8 Refer to ‘Sons of God’ or ‘Sons of Israel’?” BSac 154 (April-June 1997), pages 131-141.

⁹⁵ Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (OTS 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996), pages 155-159.

⁹⁶ Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, page 158 (see his note 292).

⁹⁷ Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, page 157.

when it is used of angelic, spirit “sons of God.” This is clear from the fact that the description in Hosea is figurative as it relates to the Israelites’ newfound relationship with God in contrast to his rejection of them (mentioned in the same verse). The spirit “sons of God” in Genesis (6:4), Job (1:6; 2:1; 38:7) and in the book of Psalms (89:6; compare 29:1) are not described as “sons of God” in this same context. Rather, as “sons of God” they “take their station before Jehovah” in the heavens (Job 1:6; 2:1), where they witnessed the creation of the earth.—Job 38:7.

While the description “sons of God” does not have the same meaning in every instance, its meaning is clearly revealed in some contexts by its relationship to the subjects. Some of these subjects are God’s heavenly “sons,” and as such they are considered “gods” in that they, too, are spirit beings like their Father. This is why, for example, when Jesus used the description “Son of God” for himself in John 10:33-36, it prompted the Jews to interpret his claim as if he were making himself “a god.” This account will be considered further, near the end of this chapter.

How can there be any real “gods” and yet only “one God”? In addition to noting that the “multiplicity of Old Testament terminology for *a body of divine beings subordinate to Yahweh* is not an indication that the Hebrews meant quite different things when they referred to Yahweh’s ‘host,’ ‘council,’ ‘assembly of gods,’ to ‘the sons of (the) God(s)’ [all references to angels], etc.,”⁹⁸ Gerald Cooke (with emphasis added) observes:

We have found *the conception of lesser divine beings around Yahweh was known and utilized throughout Israel’s biblical period*, beginning possibly as early as the Yahwist in the early Genesis references and in Ps 29 and Dt 33 ... and extending to the book of Daniel. ... The functional distinction of the gods of the peoples among this heavenly company is made clearer, however by II Isaiah and Ps. 82. II Isaiah denies the existence of gods other than Yahweh; yet it is quite likely that II Isaiah himself continued to make use of the conception of the heavenly company [compare Isa 6:1-4, 6-7]. ... It seems to the writer equally likely that it is to be explained in terms of a distinction within the heavenly company as a living reality of Israelite faith,

⁹⁸ Cooke, “The Sons of (The) God(s),” page 39.

*for the poet-prophet condemns and denies existence to the gods of Babylon which have led the community into idolatry and apostasy. The gods of a foreign people, and perhaps the gods worshipped by all the nations, are denied existence by one who is seeking to meet an immediate and critical religious need. None deserves the worship which is due Yahweh alone; none can perform the role which belongs to Yahweh alone, for there is none like Yahweh. The denial applies not to the entire heavenly company, but to the gods of a foreign people, gods that claim the worship due Yahweh alone.*⁹⁹

Cooke's observation that denials of existence for other gods in the OT have to do with the "the gods of a foreign people, and perhaps the gods worshipped by all the nations," is consistent with my earlier evaluation of the same kinds of denials that we find, for example, in the book of Isaiah. Such denials can and should be further evaluated and explained within the context of each statement and within the context of the Bible as a whole. Consider how the Jews of the NT period used descriptive terms like "God" with more than one positive meaning.

In John 8:39-41 there is an excellent example of how the Jews in Jesus' day could limit the use of a descriptive term to one individual, but then use that same term for someone else in a similar, positive, but also much different sense. Notice that in John 8:39 the Jews respond to Jesus with the words, "Our father [Greek: *ho pater hemon*] is Abraham." Then in verse 41 they reply to Jesus again, "We have one Father [Greek: *hena pater*], God." If we were to use the logic and reasoning of Trinitarians concerning the restriction of terms like "God" to certain individuals, then we would have to conclude that the Jews believed that Abraham was God, their "one Father"! Why? Because in the same discussion with the same person, recorded in an historical account separated by only two verses, the Jews say they have "one Father," whom they identify as "God." But they had just emphatically identified "Abraham" as their "father"!

Through the use of English capital and lower case letters, we can appreciate a difference in meaning between the word for "F/father" when used of God and when it is used of "Abraham."

⁹⁹ Cooke, "The Sons of (The) God(s)," pages 43-44 (emphasis added).

But this difference in meaning is not apparent in the Greek text. There is only one sense in which the word is applicable to just “one” (God), and another meaning that is applicable (but also with a unique sense) to at least one other person, Abraham. Then, of course, there is a more general sense in which others can be considered ‘fathers’ without threatening the sense of the word when applied to God, *or* when it is applied to Abraham (as in John 8:39).

There is no need to invent a concept of “persons” that keeps the nature of these individuals from being separated in order to properly understand the way the term “F/father” is used of “one,” and then used of another. Why, then, are Trinitarians not consistent in applying this biblical model for using and for understanding terms that are restricted in one sense to one subject (God), but not in other ways for others subjects (such as his “S/sons”)?

By looking to how words are used in the Bible in this way, we can isolate such usage as an effective, biblical model to help us apply the words for “G-god” to different subjects with the right (intended) meaning(s). We can then better understand our own relationship with the “one God, the Father” and with Jesus, who is also said to be ‘our God’ (John 20:28). Understanding how the Bible uses “God” exclusively for the Father in the “one” sense reserved for him, but also in another sense for his Son and other sons, will also keep us from having to look outside of the Bible for a theological model (like the Trinity) that may have little or nothing to do with how the words for “G-god” are actually used in the Bible itself.

With this biblical usage of the same term but with different senses for different subjects now established, I will now consider several biblical texts that use the terms “god,” “gods,” “a god,” and “God” for beings other than the “one God.” I will use the model for understanding the use of some biblical terms in one sense for just “one” individual, but in another, positive sense for others found in John 8:39-41 to help explain the biblical teaching about the “one God” and about other “gods” who are not false, idol “gods.”

“A little lower than ’elohim”—“lower than” ‘God’ or ‘gods’? The OT clearly teaches that angels are divine beings. We have seen this already in the biblical presentation of them as “sons of God,” which means they are individual gods, “sons” of the “one

God.” Additional evidence supporting the conclusion that angels are “gods” in a sense relative to their being God’s heavenly “sons” can be found in Psalm 8:5. In the Hebrew text angels are referred to in terms of their *being* as “gods” (אֱלֹהִים, *’elohim*). This word for “God” is plural in form and as such it can refer either to God himself in a majestic sense, or it can be a real numerical plural (see above, pages 139-140), meaning “gods” or “Gods.” The LXX (in 8:6) makes the identification clear from the perspective of the translators because they chose to translate the Hebrew word *’elohim* here with the Greek word for “angels” (ἁγγέλους, pronounced *angelous*).

I say that in this Psalm the angels are “referred to in terms of their *being* as ‘gods’” because the Psalmist in verse 4 is speaking about the *nature* of “mankind” ([Hebrew: *’enosh*). Man was made in comparison to those who are “gods” and to the “animals,” to the “birds,” and to the “fish of the sea.” Mankind is said to be “a little lower than” these “gods,” but above the other creatures of the earth. The author of Hebrews quotes the LXX of Psalm 8:5(6) in Hebrews 2:7, 9, showing his agreement with the identification made in the LXX of the Psalm that angels are indeed the ones called “gods.” But neither the Jews nor the author of Hebrews believed that by identifying these angels as “gods” that somehow they were compromising the unique deity of the “one God.” That they were not in fact doing so is clear from the presentation of Jah’s relationship with these angelic “gods,” his “sons,” elsewhere in the OT and in the NT.

Consider the way Jah speaks to the angel he sent before the sons of Israel: “Here I am sending an angel ahead of you to keep you on the road and to bring you into the place that I have prepared. Watch yourself because of him and *obey his voice*. Do not behave rebelliously against him, for he will not pardon YOUR transgression; because my name is within him” (Exodus 23:20, 21; emphasis added). Here Jah tells his people to “obey” the voice of the angel because ‘his name is within him.’ So as long as such angelic gods serve Jah in *his* name, and not in their own name or by glorifying themselves apart from Jah, then there is no concern that Jah’s people might be misled by a false god. What is said here in this account is similar to what occurred during Jesus’ transfiguration,

when the “one God, the Father” said: “This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved; *listen to him*” (Matthew 17:5). The Bible itself is clear that Jah uses his sons and his Son to speak for him and that he wants others to listen to them at times as if they are Jah God himself, for they have come in his name.—Compare John 5:43.¹⁰⁰

This takes us back to the fundamental assumptions by Trinitarians about the meaning for “G-god,” discussed earlier on pages 140-151. Trinitarianism’s two primary understandings for “God” are: 1) the Trinity and 2) a “person” of the Trinity. Neither understanding finds explicit articulation anywhere in the Bible, and both understandings lead to contradictions with what the Bible does teach. On the other hand, the understanding of the Father as the “one God” and of the “S/sons” of God as “gods,” “a god,” or even as “God” at times does not contradict anything in the Bible, and these beliefs are consistent with the model for word usage that we find in biblical accounts such as John 8:39-41, and so they are not dependent on post-biblical thinking and words. Further, the Bible does explicitly teach these things, both by direct language (“there is to us one God, the Father” [1 Corinthians 8:6]) and by accepted and recognized Bible language idiom (“sons of God” means they are “gods” [see pages 181-183]).

Having said all of this in defense of my understanding of angels as “gods,” Bowman believes that translating *’elohim* as “God” in Psalm 8:5 better captures the meaning of this Psalm.¹⁰¹ Bowman tries to make his case that humans can be considered a “little lower than God” in the sense of their being made in the “image” of God according to the Genesis account of man’s creation. There is no doubt that Psalm 8:3-8 contains many parallels to Genesis 1:16-28. During one online discussion I had

¹⁰⁰ Bowman does not really discuss the importance of the Hebrew for “sons of” when used of angels or heavenly beings. But he does object to the view that texts such as Psalm 8:5 teach that angels are “gods” in a positive sense. Instead Bowman believes that texts like Psalm 8:5, if directed to angels at all, are references to angels as false gods since the Bible teaches that there is only one true God (see Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989], pages 58-59; Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, pages 51-54).

¹⁰¹ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 52; Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), page 108. See also Conrad Louis, *The Theology of Psalm VIII, A Study of the Traditions of the Text and the Theological Import* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1946), pages 56-59; and the translations of the RSV and the NASB.

with Bowman over this issue several years ago, I asked (with underlining added), “Just how does Psalm 8:3-8 closely parallel Genesis 1:1, 8, 16, 26-28, so that *'elohim* in Psalm 8:5 [now I will quote what Bowman expressed to me:] ‘should be translated “God”’?” Bowman responding by referring to parallel thoughts expressed in the two accounts, as if I was questioning whether there are *any* such parallels (I was not). In fact, Bowman even suggested that I was not ‘watching myself’ when I said, “in spite of our lowly state *God made us in His image*, just below the angelic gods”!

While I recognize differences and similarities between these two accounts, my main objection (which I wrote in clear and unambiguous terms to Bowman) is this: “Just how does Psalm 8:3-8 closely parallel Genesis 1:1, 8, 16, 26-28, so that *'elohim* in Psalm 8:5 [quoting Bowman’s view] ‘should be translated “God”’?” I have underlined “so that” because Bowman argues that being made “a little lower” than *'elohim* and being crowned with “glory and honor” is parallel to man’s being made in the image of *'elohim* in Genesis 1:26. What he fails to notice is that this point does not aid him in denying that *'elohim* in Psalm 8:5 refers to angels. Indeed, regardless of the terminology used to describe man’s nature in relation to God, man’s being made in the image of God still, ultimately, involves being “lower than” angels! In making his point, Bowman simply does not refute the position that sees in Psalm 8:5 a reference to angels as “gods,” whom man is a “little lower than.”

There are parallels between the two accounts, for sure, but being made in the “image of God” in Genesis 1:26-27, which account may also involve being made in the ‘image of God’s sons,’ the angels (= “let us make man in our image”), does not mean that somehow man is also only “a little lower than” the God in whose image he has been made. Bowman equates being made “in the image of God” with being “a little lower than God,” and that connection is not expressed in either account. In fact, the wording of both accounts teaches something quite different from what Bowman suggests.

If being made in the “image of God” meant the same thing to an ancient Israelite as being made “a little lower than God,” then why do ancient Jewish versions like the LXX define *'elohim* as

“angels” in Psalm 8:5(6), but not in Genesis 1:27? Such differences make any appeal to the parallels in Genesis and in Psalms for the creation of man less convincing when it comes to denying the otherwise plain teaching of Psalm 8:5, namely, that angels are identified as “gods” whom man was made “lower than.” Just because man was made in God’s image does not mean that we are “a little lower than God”! But both man and angels can be in the same image (that of “God”) with man being “a little lower than angels.”¹⁰²

During the same online discussion with Bowman that I have been discussing relative to this issue, Bowman wrote: “Similarly, the writer of Hebrews affirms that the Son of God ‘is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his being’ (Heb. 1:3); here ‘exact representation’ (*charaktêr*) is a synonym for ‘image.’” I might accept a certain semantic overlap between what is said in Hebrews 1:1-3 and the use of the biblical word for “image,” which is in fact used of the prehuman Jesus in Colossians 1:15. However, if we follow Bowman’s reasoning then Christ as the “image” (*eikon*), as the “reproduction,” (*character*), and as the “radiance” (*apaugasma*) of God’s being (*hypostasis*) and of his “glory” (*doxa*) in Hebrews 1:3 means that the one through whom God created is “a little lower than God”! To get around this, all

¹⁰² It should also be noted here that Gen 1:26 has “God” speaking to *others* about making man in “[their] image.” Non-Trinitarian interpreters can read Gen 1:26 and see that God is speaking either directly and only to the Logos, or to the Logos and to the rest of God’s heavenly “sons.” The fact that God involves those to whom he speaks in ‘making’ man in their image does not rule out the possibility, even the likelihood, that angels are included in the expression, “Let *us* make ... *our* image.” Indeed, 4Q417, frag. 2, col. 1, line 17, speaks of “Enosh” whose “nature was patterned after the holy angels” (Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* [New York: HarperCollins, 1996], page 381). John Collins, “In the Likeness of the Holy Ones: The Creation of Humankind in a Wisdom Text from Qumran,” in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich (STDJ 30; Leiden: Brill, 1999), pages 609-618, argues that in this text “Enosh” (אֱנוֹשׁ) refers to “Adam, the original human being created by God” (page 612). Collins also cites other Jewish (midrashim) sources that refer to Adam’s creation as being in the likeness of angels (Collins, “In the Likeness of the Holy Ones,” page 615). The angels were certainly present during this time (Job 38:7), so for them to be included in the “us” and the “our” here in Gen 1:26 need not imply anything more than that they had a share in the making of man in some sense different from how the Father and Jesus were involved in the creation of “all things” (1Co 8:6). Their inclusion by God here could be similar to the role the angels appear to have had in confusing man’s languages based on the collective “us” in Gen 11:7.

sorts of terms have to be redefined and various “personal” distinctions invented that assume Trinitarianism is true, as I explained earlier in this chapter.

As noted earlier, the LXX translates *'elohim* in Psalm 8:5(6) as “angels” and some later Greek translations (those of Symmachus and Aquila) render *'elohim* here by *theos* (“God”). Several other translations follow the LXX in rendering *'elohim* as “angels” (see the readings in the Syriac Peshitta and in the Vulgate). So the Hebrew word *'elohim* was understood by the earliest of translators to apply either to God or to his angelic “sons.” Then there is the earliest Christian understanding of this OT text, which in Hebrews 2:7 and 9 also identifies the *'elohim* of Psalm 8:5 as “angels.” But in view of the difference that is often seen between *'elohim* and “angels” (namely, that “angels” is a more interpretive translation of the Hebrew word for “gods”), in our online discussion of this issue Bowman asked:

Why, if the LXX translators thought the text was referring to heavenly beings as “gods,” did they not simply render the word as *theoi* [“gods”]? That is, if the LXX translators did not have a problem with understanding Psalm 8:5 to be referring to angels as gods, why not translate *elohim* “literally” as “gods”? It is a curious thing, given Stafford’s reasoning, that the Watchtower itself seems to have had a failure of nerve on this question.

But for good reasons it is a widely-held belief among LXX scholars that many books and sections of books in the Greek OT offer a more exegetical (interpretive) translation than we find in other, more literally translated books. Emanuel Tov notes that most of the interpretive elements in the translation “were derived from the context, but it should be stressed that the translators’ concept of context was more comprehensive than ours.” Tov further states: “They [the LXX translators] referred not only to the relationship between the words in their immediate context but also to remote contexts. Furthermore, the translator might introduce any idea that the source text called to mind.”¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Emanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1981), pages 61-62. Anneli Aejmelaeus, *On the Trail of the*

Bowman ignores these facts when it comes to possible reasons for why the LXX does not use *theoi* for *'elohim* in Psalm 8:5. But the question to be answered here is not so much whether the LXX translated the Hebrew “literally,” but whether *'elohim* was *interpreted* correctly by the translators and by the author of the NT book of Hebrews. This is not a case of the LXX translators trying to *avoid* calling the angels “gods.” Rather, it is a case of their *making this identification clear*.

The translators of what we refer to as the LXX chose to use “angels” to identify these *'elohim*, rather than identify the *'elohim* as “God.” If the LXX had used *theoi* instead of “angels,” like Bowman suggests, this might have created uncertainty as to the identity of these gods, while “angels” leaves no room for doubt. But if the LXX translators understood the Hebrew *'elohim* as a reference to God, then we would be justified in asking why they did not simply translate *'elohim* by *theos*? Further, if these Jewish translators and others were so concerned about improperly attributing divinity to beings other than the “one God” of the Bible, why did they use “angels” for *'elohim* when translating and when quoting the Bible (as in Hebrews 2:7 and 9) unless they believed that the angels *were 'elohim*?

Bowman argues that “‘angels’ is certainly not a literal translation of ‘gods.’”¹⁰⁴ While it is true that “angels” is not the formal, translational equivalent of “gods” (particularly in

Septuagint Translators (Kampen—the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993), pages 67-68, similarly writes:

As I see it, the general intention of the translators was thus concerned with the meaning of the original, or meanings of words and phrases in the original. Their general intention was not directed towards the formal representation of items in the original. They did not consciously aim at word-for-word translation.

While this statement is apparently meant only for the Pentateuch, I believe it also applies in other books to a greater or lesser degree. For example, John H. Sailhamer (*The Translational Technique of the Greek Septuagint for the Hebrew Verbs and Participles in Psalms 3—41* [SBG 2; New York: Peter Lang, 1991], page 208) demonstrates that in his treatment of the Hebrew verbal forms the LXX Psalms translator(s) “sought to give the LXX Psalms the Greek form required by their sense,” and that the “sense of the LXX Psalm was that of the translator’s *interpretation*” (emphasis added). See Chapter 2 of Sailhamer’s book for examples of this. It should not surprise us, then, to find this is also true of other, non-verbal Greek translations in the LXX Psalms.

¹⁰⁴ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 52.

English), this is beside the point in this instance. Indeed, in addition to what I have noted regarding the nature of the LXX translation in many instances, consider the LXX translation of Genesis 19:16. Here the Hebrew text has “the men” (הַמְּאֲנָשִׁים), while the LXX reads “the angels” (οἱ ἄγγελοι). Certainly no one will argue that “angels” is a “literal” translation of “men”! Yet, who will deny that the LXX here translates the *meaning* of the text? The “men” who were with Lot were in fact angels (Genesis 19:1, 15), and the LXX is simply making their identity clear. The same is true regarding the use of “angels” for *'elohim* in Psalm 8:5(6) and elsewhere (see below). I can see no good reason to think the use of “angels” in Psalm 8:5(6) is any different from its use in Genesis 19:16.

Bowman, however, claims that it is not unusual for NT quotations to differ from their OT counterparts. For example, in our online discussion Bowman referred me to Ephesians 4:8 where there is a quotation from Psalm 68:18. Here Paul departs from the LXX, particularly in his use of the verb “give,” as opposed to the LXX’s “take/receive.” Further, in the Psalm the “men” are Egyptians while in Ephesians 4:8 Paul applies the term to Christians. However, we do not here in Ephesians 4:8 have a situation that is at all comparable to the quotation of Psalm 8:5(6) in Hebrews 2:7, 9. In Hebrews 2:7, 9 the reading is *in agreement with the LXX*, not different from it as we see in the case of Ephesians 4:8 and the LXX of Psalm 68:18. Bowman is simply out of agreement with Hebrews and with the LXX, at least where the meaning of Psalm 8:5(6) is concerned.

It is also not unusual to find “angels” as a translation for *'elohim* in the LXX. Examples other than Psalm 8:5(6) include Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 96(7):7, and Psalm 138:1, as well as the Greek version of Sirach (45:2-3), all four of which have “angels” or an equivalent reference for *'elohim*.¹⁰⁵ The author of

¹⁰⁵ Regarding Sirach 45:2-3, Fletcher-Louis, “4Q374: A Discourse on the Sinai Tradition,” page 243, writes:

The Greek of Sirach 45:2-3 says God “made (Moses) as glorious as the holy ones (ἁγίων).” The Genizah text has אֱלֹהִים [*'elohim*]. So the Greek clearly understood the Hebrew as a reference to an angelic, and in that sense divine, state of existence.

Hebrews even quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 in Hebrews 1:6,¹⁰⁶ again showing his agreement with the LXX’s use of “angels” for “gods,” just as we see with his use of Psalm 8:5(6) in Hebrews 2:7, 9. If the author of Hebrews did not agree with the LXX translation of “angels” for *’elohim*, then he could easily have changed the wording of the text *just as he did in Ephesians 4:8!*

Bowman’s example actually works against him by demonstrating how the NT writers were not bound to one LXX reading and could make changes to it if they were not in complete agreement with the LXX in order to capture what was, for them, the right thought for their particular application of an OT text.

Bowman’s argument would have fared better if he had cited Hebrews 10:5, where the LXX quotation of Psalm 40:6 reads, “You prepared a body for me.” The Hebrew of Psalm 40:6 says, “You cleaned out my ears.” This is a better example to use to show how the NT could contain a quote from the LXX, but in such a way that the quotation need not imply a direct or even an accurate correspondence between the Hebrew and the Greek translation. However, since the translation of “angels” for *’elohim*

¹⁰⁶ The LXX of Deut 32:43 is more likely the source of the author of Hebrews’ quotation, as there are LXX manuscripts of this text that match the quotation word for word. That the author of Hebrews primarily quotes from the Psalms is not a deterrent to accepting Heb 1:6 as a quotation from Deut 32:43, since he also quotes from 2Sa 7:14 in Heb 1:5. The quotation in Heb 1:6 seems to have come from a Hebrew recension other than the MT, which is reflected in 4QDeut^d. See Patrick W. Skehan, “A Fragment of the ‘Song of Moses’ (Deut. 32) from Qumran,” *BASOR* 136 (1954), pages 12-15; Ernest Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), page 138, 9b; Arie Van Der Kooij, “The Ending of the Song of Moses: On the Pre-Masoretic Version of Deut 32:43,” in *Studies in Deuteronomy. In Honour of C.J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, eds. F.G. Martínez, A. Hilhorst, J. Van Ruiten, and A.S. van der Woude (VTSup 53; Leiden: Brill, 1994), pages 93-100; Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, pages 248-252, 422-425. On pages 426-429 Sanders discusses the relationship between Jah and the gods spoken of in Deut 32:8 (see below), in verse 43, and in verses 12 and 39, where we read that there are no gods “with” Jah. Sanders (*The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, page 427) then concludes:

Verse 12 and verse 39 say that there is no god ‘with’ YHWH. These affirmations relate to his activity: YHWH is the only god who acts on behalf of Israel. In that respect there is no other god with him. ... Though the conceptual background of the passage [Deut 32:8-9] may be archaic the message of the passage is completely in line with the ‘monotheistic’ affirmations in the song: other gods may exist—in fact they do—but for Israel the only significant god is YHWH. He is even the highest god (עליון) and the other gods (אלהים בני) are subordinate to him.” [See also Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, pages 237-238 for more on Deut 32:39.]

is nowhere near the kind of semantic difference we see between the Hebrew and the LXX translation for Psalm 40:6, and since the use of "angels" for *'elohim* is not isolated to one particular text, Hebrews 10:5 is also not a proper analogy for what is happening in Hebrews 2:7, 9 or in Hebrews 1:6.

As for why Hebrews 10:5 accepts the meaning of the LXX over the Hebrew of Psalm 40:6, it may be that at this point the LXX reflects a more accurate Hebrew text than we find in the MT. This is clearly the case with Deuteronomy 32:43, which differs from the MT but which agrees with the more primitive text of 4QDeut^q (see note 106).

It is clear, then, that Psalm 8:5, as translated or as interpreted by the LXX and by the author of the book of Hebrews, presents man as having been made "a little lower than gods," "gods" whom the LXX Jews and the NT Christians understood to be "angels." Significant in this light is the biblical presentation of Jah as "the God of gods" (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:2; Daniel 11:36). In view of the fact that Jah is a God, not of the dead, "but of the living" (Matthew 22:32), these gods over whom Jah is God cannot be lifeless idols made of wood and stone. As we have seen, the only ones who are positively identified as "gods" in the Bible are Jah's heavenly "sons."

"I said: 'You are gods.'" Bowman has a difficult time answering questions about texts that call these "sons of God," "gods." I say this because Bowman attempts to adjust the discussion about the "sons of God" being "gods" (in the plural) to whether they are ever called "G-god" (in the singular) by, for example, the use of *theos*. Bowman writes: "We find it [the singular use of *theos*] is used only in one of two ways: of the true God (approximately 1,400 times) or of a false god (6 times: Acts 7:43; 12:22; 28:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 3:19; 2 Thess. 2:7[*sic* (verse 4?)])."¹⁰⁷

In addition to not carefully considering a very significant use of the singular *theos* in John 1:18 (discussed further in Chapter 4), Bowman fails to note the significance of Jesus' use of Psalm 82 in John 10:30-36. Bowman also does not take into account other texts in the OT where beings other than God are referred to

¹⁰⁷ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 59.

as “a god,” or even as “God,” when representing or expressing *only* the “one God’s” will.

Remarkably, Bowman does not realize that the use of the singular *theos* for the Father, for the Son, or for the Holy Spirit *contradicts* Trinitarianism, which asserts that there is *only one God* and that that one God is triune. Therefore, as we discussed earlier in this chapter, and as I will consider again in Chapter 4, to use the singular “G-god” for any one of the three “persons” of the Trinity must either identify that “person” with the Trinity or involve a special understanding of the word(s) for “G-god” that is not presented in the Bible. Bowman, being a Trinitarian, accepts Jesus as “God” if when viewed as such Jesus is only a “person” of the Trinity, not the Trinity itself. As I have shown in this chapter, neither understanding of *theos* is articulated in the Bible, and the uses of “G-god” in the Bible have nothing to do with a Trinitarian understanding of God.

Returning to the question of the use of the singular for “G-god” in the Bible, the LXX uses the singular *theos* for beings other than God but who also are viewed as lifeless idols or false gods in any sense. For example, in Judges 13 we read about “Jehovah’s angel” (verse 3) who appeared to Manoah’s wife in the form of a “man,” but who also resembled “the appearance of the angel of the true God” (verse 6). In verse 8 Manoah entreats Jah to send the “man” to them once again, to instruct them about the future of their child (Samson). Verse 9 tells us that “God” responded by sending the angel to Manoah’s wife while she was alone in the field. In verses 10-12 Manoah’s wife notifies Manoah, who then comes to speak with the angel. After verse 3, the “man” who had visited Manoah and his wife is referred to as “Jehovah’s angel” eight times (verses 13, 15, 16 [twice], 17, 18, 20, 21). In verse 16 we learn that, all this time, Manoah did not realize he was speaking to Jah’s angel. According to verse 21, when the angel of Jah no longer appeared to Manoah or to his wife, “then it was that Manoah knew that he had been Jehovah’s angel.” Yet, Manoah responds further in verse 22 by saying to his wife, “We shall positively die, because it is God we have seen.”

In view of the facts that 1) no man can see God’s face and live (Exodus 33:11, 20), and 2) Manoah and his wife *did not die*, then it is probably better to translate Judges 13:21 as, “it is a god

we have seen.” Or it could be that they simply understood the being whom they had seen to be God in that the angel represented and expressed only God’s will and being. But the text is otherwise clear: It is only *after* Manoah realizes he has seen “Jehovah’s angel” (and not Jah himself) that Manoah refers to the angel as either “God” or as “a god.” The LXX translates *’elohim* in verse 22 by using the singular *theos* (without the article) in reference to the angel.

Manoah’s fear of dying after seeing the glorious angel is understandable, particularly when you consider the similar feeling expressed by Gideon in Judges 6:22-23. There, after seeing “Jehovah’s angel,” Gideon exclaims, “I have seen Jehovah’s angel face to face!” But Jah assured Gideon: “Do not fear. You will not die.” That the “angel of Jehovah” is not Jah is clear not only from the fact that he is “Jehovah’s angel” (!), but also because Gideon *saw* him “face to face.” Moses only *spoke* with God “face to face” since, again, no one can *see* God’s “face” and live (Exodus 33:20). Gideon, Manoah, and Manoah’s wife did not die after seeing the face of “Jehovah’s angel,” showing that the angel was *not* God himself, though Manoah rightly considered the angel to be “God” or “a god” who represented Jah.

While the understanding of Psalm 8:5 is rather clear, the identification of the “gods” in Psalm 82:1-6 is a little more complicated. Still, its quotation by Jesus in John 10:34-36 provides us with one of the clearest presentations of a use of the singular for “G-god” in the Bible, for beings other than God and who are not considered false gods. Here Jesus made no attempt to distinguish between the singular “G-god” (*theos*) and the plural “G-gods” (*theoi*). Instead Jesus used a *plural* reference to justify his *singular* claim! This flies directly into the face of Bowman’s argument. Therefore, here I will provide an extended discussion of the issues as they relate John 10:34-36 and the question of who can be considered “gods” in the Bible without compromising belief in “one God, the Father.” I will also show how in John 10:34 Jesus reveals his own view of his divine claims.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ For a closer look at the quotation of Ps 82 in Joh 10:34-36, see H. Wheeler Robinson, “The Council of Yahweh,” *JTS* 45 (1944), who on page 55 concludes, “The God of the Old Testament is certainly not Trinitarian, but He is much more than the God of ‘ethical monotheism.’” See also Edwin D. Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the*

Jehovah's Witnesses responsible for the publications of the Watchtower Society understand the “gods” in Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34 to be human judges in ancient Israel. According to this view, these judges failed to faithfully execute justice on behalf of God's people and so they are condemned by Jah.¹⁰⁹ However, there is support from the Targum to the Psalms, in texts from Qumran, from the Peshitta and from several early Christian writers for identifying these “gods” as angels.¹¹⁰ I therefore believe that it is likely that in Psalm 82 Jah is rendering judgment upon the angelic gods who were appointed over various nations (see my discussion of Deuteronomy 32:8 on page 182). Parallels in Canaanite texts also strongly suggest that Psalm 82 is about “divine beings who were responsible for the dispensation of justice,”¹¹¹ but who would now “die like men.”—Psalm 82:7.

B.A. Mastin claims that Jesus' quotation of Psalm 82:6 and the Jews' response to him in this context “can only be understood as an assertion that Jesus was claiming far more than [being ‘a god’].”¹¹² But Mastin fails to explain just how the context supports his view that Jesus was claiming anything *more* than just that (being “a god”). Indeed, if anything, the fact that Jesus answered the Jews by quoting Psalm 82:6 (where beings other than Jah are called “gods”) suggests that the Jews had in fact accused him of claiming to be “a god,”¹¹³ not “God.” Otherwise

Gospel of John (NovTSup 11; Leiden: Brill, 1965), pages 60-65; Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly,” pages 123-137; Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” pages 29-34; Jerome H. Neyrey, “‘I Said: You Are Gods’: Psalm 82:6 and John 10,” *JBL* 108.4 (1989), pages 647-663; Kenneth M. Craig, Jr., “Psalm 82,” *Interpretation* 49.3 (1995), pages 281-284.

¹⁰⁹ See “‘The Word’—Who is He? According to John,” Part 2: “Prehuman Existence,” *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1962, page 566; “A Grand Spokesman—Who Is He?” *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1975, page 174; “Do You Respect the Name of Christ?” *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1983, page 21; “What Do the Scriptures Say About ‘the Divinity of Christ’?” *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1992, page 22.

¹¹⁰ See J.A. Emerton, “Some New Testament Notes,” *JTS* 11 (1960), pages 329-332.

¹¹¹ E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Jr. (HSM 24; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1986 [1980]), page 236. See especially pages 116-120, 175-244, 274-277.

¹¹² B.A. Mastin, “A Neglected Feature of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel,” *NTS* 22 (1976), page 46, note 2.

¹¹³ In addition to the NWT, the NEB in several of its early editions reads “a god” in Joh 10:33. J.W. Bowker, “The Origin and Purpose of St John's Gospel,” *NTS* 11 (1964-1965), page 406, translates, “‘You, a mere man, claim to be a god.’” Robert

Jesus' answer does not contain a sensible response (an 'answer') to the accusation by the Jews. Consider this comparison:

Jews' Accusation: "You ... make yourself God."

Jesus' Answer: "Is it not written ... : 'I said: "You are gods"?"

Jews' Accusation: "You ... make yourself a god."

Jesus' Answer: "Is it not written ... : 'I said: "You are gods"?"

A simple look at the above two translations of *theos* ("God" and "a god") involving the Jews' accusation against Jesus compared with Jesus' "answer" (Greek: *apekrithe*), shows that there is only one sensible translation for *theos* in verse 33, namely, "a god." Why? Because if the Jews' accusation was that Jesus 'made himself God' then Jesus' "answer" is no answer at all! Using a text that refers to either angels or even to humans "against whom the word of God came" as "gods" does not "answer" or justify a person's claim to be "God"! The Jews could simply have replied to Jesus, "Our complaint is not that you are claiming to be 'a god,' like those in the Psalm you quote, but that you are claiming to be *God*." But they did not.

Citing a text calling either humans or angels "gods" does not at all answer a charge that Jesus claimed to be "God." So it must be the Jews thought Jesus was claiming to be "a god" by calling himself "God's Son" (John 10:36). *That* would explain Jesus' use of Psalm 82:6 *in his defense*, namely (after quoting the Psalm), "[Jesus:] If he called 'gods' those against whom the word of God came, and yet the Scripture cannot be nullified, do you say to me whom the Father sanctified and dispatched into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, I am God's Son?"

There could not be any clearer explanation of Jesus as "a god" than what Jesus himself says here in John 10:34-36: 1) the Bible calls others "gods"; 2) those others whom Scripture calls "gods" are God's "sons," in this case, those "against whom the word of God came"; 3) Jesus was "sanctified and dispatched" by

Young, in *Young's Concise Critical Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), page 62, reads "'makest thyself a god,' not 'God.'" Neyrey, "'I Said: You Are Gods,'" page 661, translates verse 33 as, "make yourself a god." Finally, C.C. Torrey, *The Four Gospels* (2d ed.) translates this text as, "'You, a man, make yourself god.'" Compare also the note on page 324 of Torrey's translation.

the Father as God’s Son; and, therefore, 4) he more so than any of God’s other “sons” should be considered “a god” who represents the “one God.”

In John 10:30-36 Jesus himself taught that beings other than Jah God can be called “gods,” and that Jesus considered himself to be one of these other “gods” who are “sons of the Most High.” Jesus even defended himself against the Jews’ accusation that he ‘made himself a god’ *by quoting an OT text that calls others “gods.”* That is exactly what Jehovah’s Witnesses do today when we are called on to explain how Jesus can be “a god” in the Bible when there is “one God, the Father”! Further, in John 10:33-34 we have yet another contradiction to Bowman’s claim that there is some difference between the singular and the plural use of *theos*, since in this account Jesus uses the plural “gods” to answer the charge against him being *theos* in the singular. So Jesus evidently did not see the kind of distinction in meaning between a singular and a plural use of “G-god” that Bowman creates.

Indeed, in May 2003 I debated Bowman publicly on the subject, “Is Jesus God?”¹¹⁴ Twice I brought up John 10:33-36 and twice Bowman ignored it.¹¹⁵ Later in 2003 I debated Dr. James

¹¹⁴ See “Is Jesus God? a debate between Greg Stafford and Robert M. Bowman, Jr.” (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2003), available on DVD through the Elihu Books website (<http://www.elihubooks.com>).

¹¹⁵ Even in their new book, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), Robert M. Bowman, Jr., and J. Ed Komoszewski do not give much consideration to this account. Indeed, Bowman and Komoszewski assume without any evidence that Jesus’ opponents “understood Jesus to be claiming to do things that only God can do,” which also appears to assume that God cannot show someone the things he does and empower that person (indeed, his own Son) to do what may have previously been only within God’s authority to do (Joh 5:19-20), such as forgive sins (Matt 9:3-8; Lu 5:21; Ac 5:30-32). Further, in the one and only reference to the text Jesus quotes in his defense (Ps 82:6) Bowman and Komoszewski acknowledge only that this is a text where “apparently” angels are called “gods” (Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, page 334, note 2). But they do not attempt to explain just how Jesus’ use of a text where “angels are apparently called ‘gods’” fits with the alleged, ‘explicit’ accusation by the Jews that Jesus “is in some way claiming to be God” (Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, page 239). In spite of their not discussing what is perhaps the most important qualifying part of this account (that is, the accusation of the Jews and the answer by Jesus with his quotation of Ps 82:6), Bowman and Komoszewski conclude that while the translation “a god” in the NWT and in other Bible translations “may be grammatically possible” it is “not contextually plausible” (Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, page 355, note 8). Yet, as shown above “a god” is in fact

White on a similar subject, "Jesus Christ: God or a god?"¹¹⁶ In my debate with Dr. White I brought up the fact that Bowman had previously ignored my use of John 10:33-36, and I asked that Dr. White not similarly avoid this account. He did not. But consider the following transcription of our debate over this account during our 2003 Tampa, Florida debate:

Stafford, Opening Statement (around minute 34 of the Elihu Books DVD of the debate): John Chapter 10, beginning in verse 31, it says that "once more the Jews lifted up stones to stone him," that is, Jesus, "and Jesus replied to them, 'I displayed to you many fine works from the Father, for which of those works are you stoning me?' The Jews answered him, 'We are stoning you not for a fine work but for blasphemy because you although being a man make yourself *theos*,'" which can be translated either "God" or "a god." The *New World Translation* and several other Bibles, including the *New English Bible*, translate it "a god," some "God." Let's go with the translation "God," capital G-o-d. "You although being a man make yourself God," capital G-o-d. "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods'?"' If he called 'gods' those against whom the word of God came and yet the Scripture cannot be nullified, do you say to me whom the Father sanctified and dispatched into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, I am God's Son?" Now think about this just for a moment. If the Jews accused Jesus of claiming to be "God," capital G-o-d, which most modern translations would have you believe, what's the point of him referring to Psalm 82 and a reference to others as "gods"? How does that help his argument one bit? It doesn't, at all. If I were a religious leader in that day I'd look back and I'd say, "Well, look, our claim is not that you're claiming to be one of these 'gods,' these judges, angels, or even false 'gods,'" it doesn't matter what kinds of "gods" those are in Psalm 82, "we claim that you are calling yourself 'God,'" capital G-o-d. So essentially Jesus would've just had no point at all. Now let's change it again and go back to a translation that says, "You claim to be a god." "We do not stone you for a fine work but for blasphemy because you although being a man make yourself a god. In answer Jesus said to them, 'Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods'?"' If he called 'gods' ... if he called those against whom the word of God came 'gods' and yet the Scripture cannot be nullified, do you say to me whom the Father sanctified and dispatched into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, I am God's Son?" Now that makes sense. The point there is that,

the *only* "contextually plausible" translation, that is, if we are to in any meaningful way directly associate Jesus' "answer" with the Jews' charge against him.

¹¹⁶ See "Jesus Christ: God or a god? A debate between Greg Stafford and Dr. James White" (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2003), available on DVD through the Elihu Books web site (<http://www.elihubooks.com>).

look, what’s the problem here? We all know that in the Scriptures others are called “gods.” “You,” either he’s referring to the Israelite judges of old, angelic gods who are spoken of in the book of Psalms as in some sense forming a council of divinities around Jehovah, or even if it was just false gods. The point is, he used *that* category of divinities to support his claim. He put himself in that category of divinity. He didn’t quote a text that referred to God almighty as being God and that was fulfilled in himself, which he could have done. He quoted a text that referred to other inferior, secondary gods, separate ontologically from Jehovah, to support his claim. That’s the claim I am supporting this evening, that Jesus is in fact a god separate from Jehovah. His claim was to be a god separate from Jehovah, and he had every right to do so scripturally, as he himself showed.

Dr. White, Rebuttal (around minute 55 of the Elihu Books DVD of the debate): Mr. Stafford has admitted that it is very easy to read Hebrews Chapter ... uh, uh, Psalm 82 and recognize that the people that are in view here are unrighteous judges. They’re the judges of Israel. Just read the Psalm. It goes on to say, “How long will you judge unrighteously.” It talks about widows and orphans and it talks in the next verse about them falling like any one of the princes and dying like a man. These are talking about human judges. They are unrighteous judges. So why does Jesus cite this? Well, it’s not because he’s saying, “No, I’m just a god like you all are gods.” What is he doing? He is applying this passage to them. *They* are the unrighteous judges. He says, “How do you convict me of blasphemy when the Father has anointed me?” He’s identifying *them* as the false “gods,” as those who are the unrighteous judges in Psalm 82. This isn’t some passage where somehow Jesus is saying, “Well, see, I’m just ‘a god’ like, like judges are ‘gods.’” That’s not the, the intention of Jesus’ rebuttal at all. He is in fact bringing charges against his accusers in that passage. And so you don’t have angels being called “gods” here. The “gods” here are those who were judges, and why are they called “gods”? The very next verse says, “You’ll die like a man.” Is anyone confused that what the Scripture is saying is that these are true divinities? Is this really a parallel to the way that Jesus is called “God”? Is being the Creator? Is being the one worshipped by all created things? Surely not. Instead they’re called “gods” because they are given God’s authority to judge amongst the people *and* they will be held accountable for how they utilize that authority. And so John Chapter 10 does not establish that Jesus somehow views himself as merely a modern example of the use of “god” in Psalm 82. In fact he’s not applying that to himself at all in that way. He is bringing a charge against his Jewish, uh, opponents at that particular point in time.

Stafford, Rebuttal (around hour 1, minute 16 of the Elihu Books DVD of the debate): Let's go back to John 10 for just a second. Because Dr. White did in fact address that point, but I don't believe his answer is sufficient or satisfactory and I'll tell you why. Because it seems to suggest that he simply was referring to the Jews as a category of unrighteous judges and condemning them based on their actions. That's not necessarily the case. In fact, there's a ... there's a number of arguments that can be shown that this in fact does apply to angelic beings, perhaps unrighteous judges, maybe even false gods. It doesn't matter. Remember the question: How does Jesus' use of this text answer the charge? Dr. White did not answer that question. He suggested an application of the text being made by Jesus. But I didn't see how that made Jesus' point in answering the Jews' charge. Let's take a look again. Verse 33, "We are stoning you not for a fine work but for blasphemy, even because you although being a man make yourself God," or, "a god." "Jesus *answered them*, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, 'You are gods'?"' Now the claim, the charge: "You claim to be a god"; "is it not written in your law that 'you are gods.'?" You see, there's a charge; there's an answer. That's the relationship going on here. Anything else and there... and Jesus is not answering the charge. In fact he goes on, 'If he called "gods" those against whom the word of God came and yet there's no problem, do you say to me whom the Father sent forth that I blaspheme because I'm God's Son?' Now we know he's answering the charge. Why? Because of the charge of blasphemy. "You,"...because, because of blasphemy "because you make ... you though being a man make yourself a god." 'You say I blaspheme because I said I'm God's Son?' He's answering the charge. He does that by quoting a text that calls others "gods." That's what's going on here. Now, if we can ... if Dr. White would like to re-address that later, fine. But Jesus is making use of a text that calls others "gods" in his own defense of their claim that he claimed to be "a god." If it's not a legitimate use of the text, then Jesus did not legitimately answer their point. I believe he did. And that's why he used *that* text and not some other text that called God, "God." Or a messianic reference like Isaiah 9:6. How easy would that have been? Why that text? Why Psalm 82? Because that's the kind of god he's claiming to be, not in terms of unrighteous human judge, but in terms of a divine authority, which is what those judges were.

Dr. White, Summation (around hour 2, minute 15 of the Elihu Books DVD of the debate): We have looked at John Chapter 10. I think that I have given a very clear answer, and in light of Jesus' own words both before and after that passage it is clear he is *not* paralleling himself with unrighteous judges. He is paralleling himself as the one having the power of life and death and only Yahweh does that: Deuteronomy 32.

Stafford, Summation (around hour 2, minute 25 of the Elihu Books DVD of the debate): John Chapter 10. I don’t ... I did not hear an answer to the question of why Jesus’ use of Psalm 82 was relevant in answering the charge. I heard a lot of discussion about how the Jews were these unrighteous judges and how this somehow justifies the claim that they were incorrect in condemning him for blasphemy, but I still don’t understand how that represents an answer to the charge, ‘You claim to be God.’ ‘You claim to be a god.’ ‘Is it not written, “You are gods”?’ Take a good look at that text. See what you think.

The above debate relative to the question of Jesus’ use of a text in the OT that calls others “gods” (Psalm 82:6), this in order to justify his claim to be *theos*, or God’s Son, shows clearly that Jesus *did* view himself as “a god” in the same sense that others besides the “one God” can be considered “gods” or “a god” because they are God’s “sons.” Jesus made this clear without ‘nullifying the Scripture’ which teaches us, as reiterated by Paul in the NT, “there is to us one God, the Father” (1 Corinthians 8:6). Jesus is not “paralleling himself with unrighteous judges,” and I never stated or even suggested this is what he was doing by quoting Psalm 82:6. Dr. White simply would not address my point about Jesus’ use of Psalm 82:6 in “*answer*” to the Jews’ charge of blasphemy.

In fact, Dr. White continued to bring up unrelated issues about *who* the “gods” are in Psalm 82:6 when I made it quite clear that where it concerns my point it makes no difference whether these “gods” are human judges, angels, or even false gods. What I argued then and what I argue now is that Jesus’ response to the Jews’ accusation that he claimed to be *theos* or God’s Son shows that his claim did not involve any ‘ontological oneness’ with the “one God.” Jesus did not claim to be this “one God” or a “person” of the “one God.” *Jesus defended his right to be called “a god” by referring to an OT text that calls “sons” of God “gods”!*

Even in an account where Jesus expresses his oneness with the Father (John 10:30), and where that expressed oneness gives rise to the charge that he claimed to be *theos*, Jesus “answered them” not by arguing that there is some basis for identifying him and the Father as “persons” of a triune God. Rather, again, Jesus argued that even those “against whom the word of God came”

can be called “gods.” How much more so, then, should “God’s Son,” whom “the Father sanctified and dispatched into the world,” be considered “a god” (John 10:36)? In fact, it is this teaching concerning *divine sonship*, not ontological oneness, that is clearly expressed in the Psalm on which Jesus relies for his defense and for his identity as “a god” (Psalm 82:6). *That* is the godship Jesus claimed, a divine sonship which is entirely biblical based on the good reasons found in the Bible that I have presented in this chapter.

Jesus is different from the other “sons of God” who are “gods” as he is, in that while they were condemned by God for not representing completely the “one God’s” Godship, Jesus did just that, and he did so faithfully until death. The “sons of the Most High” in Psalm 82 were not “sanctified and dispatched” by the “one God.” But Jesus was correct in his response to the Jews when he used Scripture to show that others besides God himself are called “gods,” those who, like Jesus, are “sons of the Most High.” This is also taught today by Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Christian Witnesses of Jah.

Biblical monotheism is the belief in “one God, the Father.” It is clear, then, that according to the Bible there is “one God, the Father,” and also that there are “sons of God” who are called “gods” without ‘nullifying the Scripture’ (Psalm 82:6; Job 38:7; John 10:33-36; 1 Corinthians 8:6). Some of these “sons” are condemned by God for not expressing and representing the “one God’s” will and the Godship as they should, while the Son of God was sent by the Father to do just that, and in that he succeeded (John 5:30; 6:38; 7:16-18; 8:28; 12:48-50). That is why after Jesus showed his Jewish opponents that others can be called “gods” in Scripture without ‘nullifying’ it, Jesus went to tell them according to John 10:37-38:

If I am not doing the works of my Father, do not believe me. But if I am doing them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, in order that you may come to know and may continue knowing that the Father is in union with me and I am in union with the Father.

In saying the above, Jesus showed clearly just how he and the Father are “one” (compare John 17:21-23). In light of the

clear biblical presentation of “one God, the Father,” of God’s “sons” as “gods,” and of Jesus as one of these divine sons (indeed, as *the* divine Son), how should we define biblical monotheism?

Though “monotheism” is not a word used in the Bible itself, we can define it in such a way so that we capture within it the biblical teachings that there is “one God, the Father” and that this “one God” has many divine sons who are “gods.” These “gods” who may either represent the “one God” exclusively, and thereby *be* this “one God” to others, or Jah permits them to some extent to act on their own as gods, independently of his will and desire (as we see with Satan [compare Job 2:1-5]). To define *biblical* monotheism, we should use only the Bible. “Otherwise,” as Larry Hurtado points out, “we implicitly import a definition from the sphere of theological polemics in an attempt to do historical analysis.”¹¹⁷ Hurtado also writes:

I propose that Jewish monotheism can be taken as constituting a distinctive version of the commonly-attested belief structure described by Nilsson as involving a “high god” who presides over other deities. The God of Israel presides over a court of heavenly beings who are likened to him (as is reflected in, e.g., the OT term for them “sons of God”). In pagan versions, too, the high god can be described as father and source of the other divine beings, and as utterly superior to them. In this sense, Jewish (and Christian) monotheism, whatever its distinctives, shows its historical links with the larger religious environment of the ancient world.¹¹⁸

Hurtado here recognizes that in Jewish monotheism there were many “other deities,” namely, “heavenly beings who are likened to him ... ‘sons of God.’” These beings were distinguished from the one God of Israel “more in degree than kind as to their attributes, some of these beings portrayed as in fact sharing quite directly in

¹¹⁷ Larry W. Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by ‘First-Century Jewish Monotheism?’” page 356, in *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993).

¹¹⁸ Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by ‘First-Century Jewish Monotheism?’” page 365.

God's powers and even in his name."¹¹⁹ For Hurtado, the key to Jewish monotheism lies in this fact: "It is required to offer God worship; it is inappropriate to offer worship to any other."¹²⁰ But Hurtado does not sufficiently explain just how other beings can receive worship in such a way that it is "to the glory of the Father." When considered in this light, it is clear that in the Bible beings other than God can be given worship as long as that worship is not for *their* glory, but for the glory of the "one God" (1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:11; see Chapter 5, under the heading, "The 'Worship' of Jah's Firstborn").

Other scholars who have studied Christian origins also recognize that divine beings other than God were acceptable to biblical Jews. For example, Peter Hayman argues that "God is king of a heavenly court consisting of many other powerful beings ... but he is not the only divine being."¹²¹ Hayman points to this understanding in the Jewish ancestral religion as part of the reason why many Jews of the first century CE were prepared to accept the divinity of Jesus. Indeed, that is what appears to be at the heart of Jesus' own use of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34, discussed earlier. But other scholars, such as Richard Bauckham, have adopted a stricter view of monotheism for pre-70 CE Judaism.

Bauckham does not believe, for example, that "Jewish intermediary figures are of any decisive importance for the study of early Christology."¹²² Yet, in his study Bauckham fails to properly explain or discuss the use of *theos* for Jesus and others in the Bible, which shows that such usage has nothing to do with Trinitarianism

¹¹⁹ Hurtado, "What Do We Mean by 'First-Century Jewish Monotheism'?" page 367.

¹²⁰ Hurtado, "What Do We Mean by 'First-Century Jewish Monotheism'?" page 365. On page 364 Hurtado also concludes: "The evidence we have surveyed here shows that it is in fact in the area of worship that we find 'the decisive criterion' by which Jews maintained the uniqueness of God over and against both idols and God's own deputies." Again, I contend that as long as the worship given to any of God's sons or "deputies" is "to the glory of God the Father" then such worship is *not* directed to the son or 'deputy' even if it is *given* to a representative of God. As long as the worship given is meant for God himself, and only given to his representative because the representative stands in God's place, with God's approval, then there is no threat to the exclusive worship that is to be given to the "one God," for it is in fact meant for him.

¹²¹ Peter Hayman, "Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" *JJS* 42 (1991), page 15.

¹²² Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism & Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), page 4.

and, in fact, *does* involve “intermediary figures” or “gods.” This can be seen not only from the texts considered earlier, but also in Jesus’ own role as a *mediator* or “intermediary figure,” between the “one God” and men.—1 Timothy 2:5.

A closer look at Bauckham’s arguments shows that he has been victimized by the very same assumptions informing Bowman, White, Erickson, and other Trinitarians. For example, Bauckham refers to texts such as Philippians 2:6-11, claiming that it teaches Jesus’ “identification as YHWH.”¹²³ Not only does Philippians 2:6-11 say that Jesus’ exaltation is for “the glory of God the Father,” but it is “God” who exalts Jesus! Only by redefining “God” here to mean “God the Father, the first person of the Trinity” (and thereby assuming Trinitarianism in one’s reading of this text), can one conclude as Bauckham does. Further, on what basis should we conclude the ending of Isaiah 45:23 (as quoted by Paul in Philippians 2:10), is giving glory to anyone other than Jah? Again, since what is done in Philippians 2:10-11 is “to the glory of God the Father,” what good reasons do we have for going beyond the text and its identification here of anyone but “the Father” as Jah?

If we simply stick to the biblical text, then it is easy to accept it as teaching what it says: God exalts the one who submitted himself to him and who was faithful to God until death. In the Bible this exaltation has nothing to do with an ontological identity of the exalted one “as YHWH.” Indeed, it is not even the *human* Jesus (the one who is exalted!) who is ‘identified as YHWH’ by Trinitarians in such texts! If it is, and if we read Philippians 2:6-11 in the light of Trinitarianism by assuming that it is Jesus’ human nature that is so exalted, then we must accept that in Philippians 2:9 either Jesus’ human nature is ‘identified as YHWH’ or his divine nature was so identified by means of his exaltation by God. But the latter view would not then agree with the Trinitarian belief that in his divine nature Jesus is *eternally* YHWH.¹²⁴

Hurtado, though to a lesser extent than Bauckham, also falls victim to the traditional explanation of Jesus’ “I am” sayings, to a Trinitarian understanding of the quotation of Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:6-11, and to an inaccurate view of the uses of

¹²³ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, page 53.

¹²⁴ In the next chapter I will discuss the biblical doctrine of Jesus ‘emptying himself’ of his divine nature and taking on a fully human nature, as taught in Php 2:6-8.

proskyneo (“worship” or “obeisance”) for Jesus in the NT.¹²⁵ Still, Hurtado’s model for explaining early Christian monotheism (namely, that christological developments in early first century Christianity were “assisted by the divine agency tradition of an exalted position next to God in heavenly glory”¹²⁶), is far more convincing than is Bauckham’s model. I also agree with Hurtado’s approach of trying not to read first-century texts “in the light of later creedal developments”¹²⁷ for, as Hurtado rightly observes:

Quite a lot could be accommodated in Jewish speculations about God’s retinue of heavenly beings, provided that God’s sovereignty and uniqueness were maintained, especially in cultic actions. I think that we may take it as likely that the glorious beings such as principal angels who attend God in ancient Jewish apocalyptic and mystical texts were intended by the authors very much as indicating God’s splendour and majesty, and not as threatening or diminishing God in any way. The greater and more glorious the high king, the greater and more glorious his ministers, particularly those charged with administering his kingdom.¹²⁸

This is precisely what we see in the life and ministry of Jesus, and in the writings of his early followers as recorded in the NT. Hurtado recognizes the relationship between NT christology and “Jewish traditions of principal agent figures,”¹²⁹ but he is also careful to point out the significant differences that constitute a “mutation” (used in a non-pejorative sense¹³⁰) of these Jewish traditions. Jehovah’s Witnesses do not share Hurtado’s view of certain religious practices relating to Jesus in the NT (such as the extent to which Hurtado would say that prayer was offered to the risen Christ¹³¹), but we do believe that Jesus is exalted far above

¹²⁵ Larry W. Hurtado, “Pre-70 CE Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion,” *JTS* 50.1 (1999), pages 40-41, 52-53.

¹²⁶ Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), pages 93-94.

¹²⁷ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, page viii.

¹²⁸ Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by ‘First-Century Jewish Monotheism?’” page 367.

¹²⁹ Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by ‘First-Century Jewish Monotheism?’” page 367.

¹³⁰ See Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, pages 99-100.

¹³¹ See Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, pages 104-107.

other intermediary figures mentioned in Jewish, non-biblical literature.

Regardless of how highly exalted Jesus is in the NT, even if it is to the point of receiving and responding to our prayers,¹³² it is still “to the glory of God the Father” and so it is acceptable within the biblical understanding of the Father as the “one God.” The Trinity is both not needed to explain such relationships, and it contradicts what we are told in the Bible about the “one God” and about his Christ. Biblical monotheism requires only the acceptance of “one God, the Father,” but not to the exclusion of others who are properly considered “gods,” “a god,” or even “God” by virtue of their being “sons of God” or “God’s Son,” all of whom represent and express only their Father’s will.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to show that the Bible teaches clearly, and without any legitimate controversy, that there is “one God, the Father” (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6). Trinitarians on the other hand have for centuries been unwilling to accept this biblical truth and then make subject to it all other references to anyone else called “gods,” “a god,” or even “God” in the Bible. Instead of accepting the biblical teaching that God himself allows other beings (indeed his own heavenly “sons”) to be called or to be considered “gods” or even “God,” though always to the Father’s glory, Trinitarians deny what the Bible teaches about the “one God” and his “sons,” and instead they redefine the nature and the identity of both according to Trinitarianism.

Trinitarians also regularly say what they do not mean (“Jesus is God” [which cannot for them mean Jesus is the Trinity, even though they believe the Trinity is the ‘only God’]), and they almost always mean what they or what the Bible text does not say (“God the Father” = “the first ‘person’ of the Trinity”). The assumptions of Trinitarianism make it especially important for non-Trinitarians to require that Trinitarians explain exactly how

¹³² See my Second Edition of this book, Appendix E, pages 583-586, which subject will be further discussed in a pending *Elihu Online Paper*.

they are using terms like “God,” “Father,” “person,” and others when explaining what the Bible teaches. Only if this is done during the course of a discussion or a debate with a Trinitarian will a non-Trinitarian avoid the pitfall of agreeing with what is *said* (such as, ‘The “God” Jesus is “with” in John 1:1 is the Father’), even though we do not agree with what the Trinitarian *means* (namely, ‘The “God” the Word is “with” in John 1:1 is the Father, the first “person” of the Trinity), which understanding would require far more evidence than Trinitarians can provide using the Bible alone.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that all Christians need the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit, for it is in their names that we are to baptize and to be baptized (Matthew 28:19). What we deny is that anyone needs the Trinity in order to have the Father, his Son, and the holy spirit. We do not ‘deny the deity of Christ.’ Indeed, Jehovah's Witnesses are *champions of Jesus' godship*, which mirrors that of the “one God” (Hebrews 1:3). What we deny is that Jesus' deity *depends* on his sharing the same nature of being with the “one God,” his Father. Therefore, in the next several chapters I will give considerable attention to the teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses concerning God's heavenly Son, and to how he is presented as “the Christ,” as “a god,” and even as “God” to us according to the Father's will and purpose.

3

Jesus of Nazareth The Christ from Heaven

Jehovah's Witnesses believe and teach that Jesus is the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament (OT), the promised "seed" that Jah said would fatally strike the "original serpent," Satan the Devil (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 2; 110:1; Isaiah 11:1-9; 52:9-53:12; Micah 5:2-5; Malachi 3:1-4; Revelation 12:9). Witnesses also believe the Bible teaches that Jesus enjoyed a real, personal, separate existence "with God" as his divine Son made in Jah's exact image (John 1:1; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). However, not everyone professing belief in Jesus of Nazareth believes the same things about him as do Jehovah's Witnesses when it comes to his preexistence, or his true identity.

For example, various Unitarian and other groups hold to what is known as a "Socinian"¹ view of Jesus, meaning that they do not believe that Jesus had a real, personal preexistence before his human birth. They believe his preexistence was "ideal," that is, Jesus existed before coming to earth only as part the foreordained 'plan of God.' Proponents of this view include Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, who write, "The so-called 'pre-existence' of Jesus in John refers to his 'existence' in the Plan of God."²

¹ Named after Faustus Socinus (1539 to 1604), who believed that Jesus did not preexist his human life.

² Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* (Lanham, Maryland: International Scholars Publications, 1998), page 165.

On the other hand, we have Trinitarians who do believe that the Bible teaches that Jesus had a real, personal preexistence. But Trinitarians also believe that Jesus' preexistence is without beginning, or eternal. Writing in regards to John 1:14, Trinitarian Dr. James White claims:

"And the Word *became* flesh." Here John uses *egeneto* ["became"], a verb that refers to an action in time. And the reason is clear: the Word entered into human existence, "became flesh," at a particular point in time. The *Logos* was not eternally flesh. He existed in a nonfleshly manner in eternity past. But at a blessed point in time, at the Incarnation, the *Logos* became flesh. The Eternal experienced time.³

Setting aside (for now) Dr. White's assumptions about "time" as he attempts to explain John 1:14 (but see Chapter 5, under the heading, "The Logos and 'Time'"), we have before us the basic Socinian and Trinitarian views about the preexistence of Jesus of Nazareth. Now I will add a third perspective, namely, that of Jehovah's Witnesses, as taught in literature published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. This view is also consistent with what the Christian Witnesses of Jah teach today about Jesus of Nazareth:

Jesus ... was created by God before all other things. (Colossians 1:15) For countless billions of years, before even the physical universe was created, Jesus lived as a spirit person in heaven and enjoyed intimate fellowship with his Father, Jehovah God, the Grand Creator.—Proverbs 8:22, 27-31.

Then, about two thousand years ago, God transferred his Son's life to the womb of a woman, and Jesus came to be a human son of God, born in the normal manner through a woman. (Galatians 4:4).⁴

³ James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany, 1998), page 59.

⁴ *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1991), under the introductory heading, "The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived," and under the sub-heading, "Really, Who Was He?"

In this chapter I will provide a defense for the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses concerning the preexistence of Jesus. I will also attempt to show that both the Socinian and the Trinitarians' beliefs about Jesus' of Nazareth, in particular as it relates to his preexistence, are false, or not taught in the Bible. I believe for good reasons that I will provide in this chapter, that Jesus of Nazareth had a real, personal preexistence before he "became flesh" (John 1:14). I do not believe the Bible gives us any good reasons for concluding, as do Trinitarians, that Jesus had an *eternal* prehuman existence, and I reject the view that Jesus' preexistence was only "ideal," or real only as a part of God's "plan" or foreknowledge.

Finally, in this chapter I will present from the Bible good reasons supporting the personal but temporal (= non-eternal) preexistence of Jesus and show that Jesus is identified as the "Christ," and that this identification is made clear in the NT by means of a well-known but frequently misunderstood biblical expression, "I am" (Greek: *ego eimi*). I will discuss both Jesus' preexistence and his identity as it relates to the use of *ego eimi* and other, related expressions in the OT and in the NT. It is my contention, based on the evidence that we will now consider, that Jehovah's Witnesses teach the truth when they say that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, who had a real, personal preexistence (though not an eternal one) before he came from heaven to the earth.

"From Heaven": Real or "Ideal" Preexistence?

The real preexistence of Jesus as taught in the New Testament. In John 3:13 Jesus told Nicodemus, "Moreover, no man has ascended into heaven but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man." The idea of a "descent" when used of a person (like "the Son of man") naturally conveys the thought of real, personal existence, at least during the period of the 'descent' and thereafter. Indeed, in John 3:13 the verb used in Greek is *katabaino*. This Greek verb has the sense of "to move downward,

come/go/climb down,” often with an “indication of the place [from] which one comes or goes down.”⁵ In this case, as the text in John says, the “place” the “Son of man” came down from was “heaven.” How, though, should we understand the reference to “the Son of man”? Does this involve a real, conscious person who was alive prior to and during the ‘descent,’ and who continued existing as a person thereafter?

I will discuss the concepts associated with the “Son of man” in non-biblical Jewish literature later in this chapter. But the Bible itself contains several explicit accounts related to Jesus’ preexistence and his ‘descent’ from “heaven.” One of the more explicit texts in the NT on this subject is in Philippians 2:5-8. Elsewhere I have written about this account as it pertains both to translation and meaning. After evaluating the issues and the arguments put forth by various writers,⁶ I believe the following translation of Philippians 2:5-9 is based on the best grammatical, contextual, semantic, and historical evidence:

Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ’s, who even though he was existing in the form of God/a god [or ‘a divine form’] he did not consider this equality with [or, ‘this likeness to’] God as something to exploit. Instead he gave himself up and took on the appearance of a slave and he came to be the same as men. When he found out that he was in the same form as men, he lowered himself even further by becoming obedient until death, indeed, death by torture.

If what I propose above is correct, then in giving up his equality/likeness with God, Jesus showed the highest level of humility and obedience (indeed, worship) that is possible for one

⁵ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 514.

⁶ See my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002), note 5, pages 213-216, and especially my answer to the question, “What is your understanding of Philippians 2:5-9, and why does the NWT read so differently from versions like the NASB?” in “*Upon the Lampstand*,” December 15, 2007 (rev. February 10, 2008), pages 1-8, available through Elihu Books (<http://www.elihubooks.com>).

to demonstrate.⁷ It is, in fact, this very humility and obedience that gives Paul reason to bring up Jesus' prehuman activities in the first place (Philippians 2:5). While grammatically I do not believe the NWT's rendering has the best reasons supporting it, it is not without any good reasons.⁸ But the best available reasons

⁷ The syntactical question of Php 2:6 hinges on whether we have here an idiomatic use of *hegeomai* (a verb which in this instance means to "think" or to "consider"). By "idiomatic use" I mean a usage that conforms to what we find elsewhere regarding less disputed instances of *hegeomai* with a double accusative. More specifically, the question here has to do with the meaning of *hegeomai* where one articulated (= with the Greek article) accusative follows it and where one anarthrous (= without the Greek article) accusative precedes *hegeomai*. Where we have such a double accusative construction used with *hegeomai*, it appears the accusative following the verb (*hegeomai*) always serves as the direct object of the verb and the accusative preceding *hegeomai* serves as the predicate accusative. Predicate accusatives describe direct objects. Roy W. Hoover, "The Harpagmos Enigma: A Philological Solution," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971), pages 95-119, first proposed just such a view of this double-accusative construction, and there are several other texts with a grammatical structure that is similar to Php 2:6 that add support to his view. For example, in Isidore of Pelusium (fourth century CE) we read, *Ei hermaion hegesato to einai ison* ("If he considered being equal a treasure"). Here we have *hegeomai* used with a double accusative, that is, where the articulated accusative following the verb (*to einai ison*, "the being equal") is the direct object and the anarthrous accusative (*hermaion*, "a treasure") preceding *hegeomai* is the predicate accusative that further describes "being equal" as "a treasure." Another example of this construction is found in Diodorus Siculus (*Library* 15.4.3), "On arriving in Egypt he met the king and urged him to continue the war energetically and to consider the war against the Persians a common undertaking" (Greek: *koinon hegeisthai ton pros tous Persas polemon*). Here we have *hegeomai* followed by an articulated accusative *ton pros tous persas polemon* ("the war against the Persians") serving as the direct object, with the anarthrous *koinon* (meaning, "common undertaking") preceding *hegeomai* as the predicate accusative. Consider also the *Letter of Aristee* 292.2, which R.J.H. Shutt translates, "you consider injustice the greatest evil" (in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, James H. Charlesworth, ed. [New York: Doubleday, 1985], page 32). Here again we have the same pattern of anarthrous predicate accusative ("greatest evil," *megiston kakon*), verb ("consider," *hegeomai*), and articulated accusative object ("injustice," *ten adikian*). Still another instance of this idiom can be found in Josephus' *War of the Jews*, 2.581, where he writes, "to consider the harm of your friends as your own." Here the anarthrous predicate accusative *oikeion* ("one's own") again precedes *hegeomai* ("to consider"), and *hegeomai* is once again followed by an articulated, accusative object (*ten blaben*, "the harm"). Therefore, it seems likely that the anarthrous, accusative-*hegeomai*-articular accusative construction always conforms to the previously described usage, namely, predicate accusative-*hegeomai*-direct object accusative.

⁸ See Rolf Furuli, *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation: With a special look at the New World Translation of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 1999), pages 262-275. However, Furuli's comparison of the syntax of Php 2:6 with 3 Maccabees 3:15 (pages 270-271) and Job 35:2 and Baruch 5:9 (page

(including the syntactical idiom described in notes 7 and 8) support the view that Paul refers here to Jesus in his prehuman state “in the form of God/a god” (Greek: *morphe theou*). It is this “form” that Jesus chose to give up (= “emptied himself” [Greek: *keno'oi*]), and so he set aside this ‘equality’ or ‘likeness’ (Greek: *isa*)⁹ with God by taking on “a slave’s form,” that is, by coming

270, note 152) suffers from the fact that none of these texts have an articulated accusative following *hegeomai*. Indeed, in 3 Maccabees 3:15 the accusative *ta katoikounta* (“the inhabitants”) is the object of the infinitive verb *tithenesasthai* (“to nurse”), which makes this text very different from Php 2:6. The sense of *hegeomai* in Baruch 5:9 may also be “lead,” “guide” (“For God will lead Israel with joy ...”), and in Job 35:2 there is, again, no articulated accusative following *hegeomai*. Therefore, I do not accept Furuli’s arguments in favor of the NWT rendering of this text. The double accusative view articulated by Hoover has better reasons supporting it. Jason David BeDuhn, *Truth In Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003), page 55, refers to different words related to the verb *harpazo*, one of which is *harpagmon*. BeDuhn then concludes, “You can see that every one of these related words has to do with the seizure of something not yet one’s own.” The difference here is *harpagmon* is used in a syntactical relationship with *hegeomai* which suggests *harpagmon* describes something the prehuman Jesus *already possessed*, namely, an “equality/likeness with God.” This “is precisely another way of saying ‘in the form of God’” (Gerald F. Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal with God,” in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians* 2, Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998], page 104). BeDuhn also claims in J.C. O’Neil’s “Hoover on *Harpagmos* Reviewed, with a Modest Proposal Concerning Philippians 2:6,” *HTR* 81 (1988), pages 445-449, “Hoover’s entire argument was demolished in just four pages.” But this simply is not true where it concerns the syntactical idiom described in note 7 above. Beyond the fact that O’Neil’s arguments have “not generally persuaded critics” (Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005], page 94, note 15), O’Neil actually argues that the text in Philippians really read something that is not in or even suggested by any known NT manuscript reading. O’Neil (“Hoover on *Harpagmos* Reviewed,” page 449) argues Paul actually used a second negative (*me*) and later scribes replaced it with the Greek article *to* (“the”) so that what Paul really wrote (according to O’Neil) is, “who being in the form of God thought it not robbery not to be equal [*me einai*] with God?”! O’Neil has done nothing to ‘demolish’ the double accusative view of Hoover where *hegeomai* is concerned. Ironically, O’Neil’s article was written in “honor of Professor C.F.D. Moule on his eightieth birthday” (see “Hoover on *Harpagmos* Reviewed,” page 445). Yet, according to Hawthorne, Moule (who has written extensively about Php 2:5-9) “graciously bowed to Hoover and admitted that Hoover’s philological study had won the day and in his (Moule’s) judgment was the final answer to the enigmatic [*harpagmos*]” (Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal With God,” page 102).

⁹ The Greek word *isa*, as used in Php 2:6, can mean either “equality” or “likeness” (as in the LXX of Job 10:10; 11:12; 13:12; 28; 15:16; 24:20; 27:16; 28:2; 29:14; 30:19; 40:4; see also Wisdom 7:3). Compare the use of *isa* in Lu 20:36, where it also

to be “in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). As Hawthorne states:

This means then that “the being equal with God” is precisely another way of saying “in the form of God.” Or better still, whatever meaning one might put forth as a possible meaning for the expression [“in the form of God”] can only be properly understood in terms of [“equal to/like God”], and vice versa— [“the being equal to God”] can only be properly understood in terms of [“in the form of God/divine form”].¹⁰

Here in Philippians 2:5-11 Paul teaches us that the prehuman Jesus showed humility and obedience by giving up the “form” or “equality” he had with God (or as “a god”). This same ‘equality with God’ is taught elsewhere in the NT, in texts like Hebrews 1:3, where Jesus is said to be “the reflection of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of his [God’s] very being” (underlining added). Also, elsewhere in the NT we get additional descriptions for what Jesus gave up when he came to the earth.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we are told that “though [Jesus] was rich he became poor.” This can only refer to that which Jesus *had* but gave up, and so later he truly could be described as having ‘become poor.’ If he really did not give up the ‘riches of God’s glory’ (compare Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 4:19), but in fact still retained them while on earth, then he was merely pretending to be “poor.” Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Jesus really did give up what he had before coming to the earth, and by giving up “God’s form” and coming to the earth in “a slave’s form” (Greek: *morphēn doulou*), the Word “emptied himself” of his “riches” and became “the same as men” (Greek: *en homoiomati anthropon*). Jesus exchanged one “form” (that of “God” or “a

means “like” in that those who die and who are resurrected are “like” the angels because they “neither marry nor are given in marriage” and because “neither can they die anymore”).

¹⁰ Hawthorne, “In the Form of God and Equal with God,” page 104.

god") for another "form" (that of "man") and he "became poor" for our sakes.¹¹

Buzzard and Hunting conclude that in Philippians 2:5-9 Paul is talking about Jesus existing "in the form of God" because "as the Messiah [Jesus] was invested with a functional equality with God," and he "did not take advantage of his royal position as God's legal representative but adopted the character of a slave."¹² This view simply does not match what the text teaches. It is *prior to* 'emptying himself' that Jesus existed in the "form of God/a god." Therefore, Paul uses the present verb for "existing" (Greek: *hyparkon*) when he writes about the "form" Jesus had before he "emptied himself." Paul explains that *after* Jesus "emptied himself" of the "form of God/a god" he then took on an entirely different "form," that of a "man."

If while in the "form of God/a god" Jesus was already in the form or appearance of a "man," then there would be no need for Paul to say that he 'took on' this other form! If, as Buzzard and Hunting believe, the "form of God" is simply the "exalted status of the man Jesus"¹³ (even though Jesus is not said to be "exalted" until *after* his death [Philippians 2:10-11]), Paul could simply have said that 'Jesus was in the form of God/a god and in this form he was faithful until death.' But Paul breaks things up to show that while existing in one form ("of God/a god") Jesus did

¹¹ *Morphe* ("form") can mean simply "appearance" without implying that the "appearance" reflects the actual nature of a person or thing. Compare, for example, Mk 16:12 (longer ending) where *morphe* does not reflect a person's underlying nature since here Jesus had already been raised to life as a "spirit" being (1Co 15:45). In this account Jesus is presented as merely 'appearing' to his disciples in a human "form." This is similar to how angels 'appeared' in human forms but did not "become" men. Neither the angels nor Jesus in his post-resurrection appearances were humans by their nature; they simply took on the temporary appearance of men to such an extent that they could 'eat' (Gen 19:1-3; Lu 24:43). But in the case of the Word it is said that he "became flesh" (Joh 1:14). Unlike the angels in the OT, the Word was actually 'conceived' in a human womb (Lu 1:31), born as a child (Lu 2:7), and he grew up and "found himself" as a man (Php 2:7). This was a permanent change from one form to another, from an 'emptying' of an 'equality/likeness to God' to the 'taking on' of a 'likeness with men,' that is, until his death and resurrection when Jesus once again "became a life-giving spirit."—1Co 15:45.

¹² Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 102.

¹³ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 102.

not “exploit” his “equality” with God. Rather, the prehuman Jesus “took” (Greek: *labon*) a slave’s form and “came to be” (Greek: *genomenos*) just like men. Further, when he “found out [Greek: *heuretheis*] that he was in the same form as men” he was obedient until death.

I cannot think of any clearer division between two forms than those of “God/a god” and “man.” In fact, what we read here in Philippians 2 is nothing less than what John tells us in the Prologue to his Gospel, namely, that the Word existed “with” God as “a god” and *then proceeded to* ‘reside among us’ in the “flesh,” as a man (John 1:1, 14; see Chapter 4 for more on John 1:1). Philippians 2:5-9 does not anywhere or in any way limit the ‘emptying’ of Jesus to the ‘laying aside of his privileges.’¹⁴ The only items mentioned in this account are Jesus’ “form of God/a god” and his “equality with God” which, as noted earlier, are the same in this context.

It should almost go without saying that if Jesus gave up the “form of” or “equality with God,” then any “privileges” associated with having the “form”/“equality” were given up, too. Philippians 2:5-9 does *not* start with or limit that which Jesus “emptied himself” of to the “privileges” that come with his having the “form of” or “equality with God.” Indeed, it is the “form”/“equality” itself that Jesus gave up and that he exchanged for another, more lowly “form.” Again, he “became poor” though he previously “was rich.” However, since Trinitarian theology requires that Jesus *never* relinquish this “form of”/“equality with God,” even as he takes on another completely different form or nature (namely, that of a “man”), Trinitarians are forced to assume that what Jesus gave up is restricted to something that is not anywhere mentioned in the text itself, namely, “privileges.” Yet, as Braumann rightly observes:

It is said of this divine mode of existence that Christ existed in it in the past (*hyparchōn*, being, v. 6). It refers to his pre-existence prior to the incarnation. *en morphē theou* characterizes, therefore, his existence before his earthly life, but not his

¹⁴ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 127.

existence in that earthly life. For he emptied himself (*heauton ekenōsen*, v. 7) taking the “form of a servant” (*morphēn doulou*). This form replaces the “form of God.” It is not to be thought of like clothing put over the previous form or as an addition to the pre-existing form. Christ’s mode of being was essentially changed.¹⁵

There are other NT texts that clearly teach the real, personal preexistence of Jesus of Nazareth. For example, in John 17:5 Jesus is recorded as speaking directly to his Father, who is in the heavens (John 17:1). During this conversation Jesus says (with emphasis added), “So now you, Father, glorify me alongside yourself with the glory that I had alongside you *before the world was.*” Buzzard and Hunting take the following view of this text (with underlining added):

When Jesus says that he “had” the glory for which he now prays (John 17:5), he is merely asking for the glory which he knew was prepared for him by God from the beginning. That glory existed in God’s plan, and in that sense Jesus already “had” it. We note that Jesus did not say, “Give me back” or “restore to me the glory which I had when I was alive with you before my birth.” This notion would have been completely foreign to Judaism.¹⁶

I will discuss what would have been considered “completely foreign to Judaism” in Jesus’ day later in this chapter. But I am here interested in what is “completely foreign” to the Bible, and to its revelation of who Jesus is according to what we read therein. What Jesus’ religious enemies may have believed about preexistence in general or about the Messiah in particular is really quite secondary to what Jesus and his followers actually taught. Contrary to Buzzard and Hunting, Jesus says nothing whatsoever about “the glory which he knew was prepared for him by God

¹⁵ G. Braumann, “μορφή,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), page 706 (underlining added).

¹⁶ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 165.

from the beginning.” In fact, what Jesus tells us is completely different from the teaching of Buzzard and Hunting. Indeed, here I will provide a comparison between what Buzzard and Hunting claim Jesus “did not say,” with what John says Jesus *did* teach.

Buzzard and Hunting also claim “Jesus did not say” to the Father, “Give me back” or, “restore to me the glory which I had when I was alive with you before my birth.” Yet, using slightly different wording that *is* what Jesus said in prayer to his Father according to John 17:5, “So now you, Father, glorify me alongside yourself with the glory that I had alongside you before the world was.” Consider again both what Jesus said and what Buzzard and Hunting say Jesus said:

Buzzard/Hunting: Jesus did not say, “restore to me the glory which I had”;

Jesus: Did say, “glorify me alongside yourself with the glory that I had.”

Buzzard/Hunting: Jesus did not say, “I was alive with you before my birth”;

Jesus: Did say, “I ... alongside you before the world was.”

The very things that Buzzard and Hunting say Jesus did *not* say are, in fact, the very things Jesus is said to have said! There is nothing controversial at all about the text or about the translation of John 17:5. Jesus speaks to the Father and then he refers nostalgically to his life “before the world was.” That Jesus here refers to his “life” is clear from the use of the first-person form of the verb for “have” (Greek: *eichon* [“the glory that I had”]), from the preposition “with” (Greek: *para*), and from the second-person pronoun in the dative case (Greek: *soi*).

These good reasons reveal Jesus’ personal, prehuman association “with” the Father “*before* [*pro*] the world was.” John 17:5 has Jesus asking the Father to have once more the glory he gave up according Philippians 2:5-9, which glory Jesus enjoyed in the “form of God/a god” *prior to* ‘taking on the form of a man.’ Jesus had this glory *before* he came to earth, when he was “with God,” not only as a part of “God’s plan” but “alongside” or “with” God “in the beginning.”—Proverbs 30:4; John 1:1.

Rather than comment on the pronominal references, the preposition “with,” or the nostalgic expressions of Jesus in John

17:5, Buzzard and Hunting try to compare Jesus' use of "had" ("the glory I *had*") with Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, should be dissolved, we are to have a building from God, a house not made with hands, everlasting in the heavens."

The idea behind Buzzard and Hunting's connecting these two texts has to do with their belief that "a Christian in the future, after the resurrection at Christ's return, will be able to say that he has now received what he already 'had,' i.e. laid up for him in God's plan."¹⁷ However, the problem with comparing John 17:5 and 2 Corinthians 5:1 in this way is that the verb for "have" is in the present form in 2 Corinthians 5:1, showing that it is something "laid up for him in God's plan." In John 17:5 John uses a *past* verb form for what Jesus at one time "had," does not have now (at the time of the speech events of John 17:5), but that Jesus wants again! If the "glory" that Jesus "had" according to John 17:5 is what belonged to Jesus already (because it "existed in God's plan"), then John could simply have used the present form of the verb like Paul did in 2 Corinthians 5:1.

For good reasons, then, it is clear Jesus "had" a glory "with" God "before the world was." Therefore, he "had" this "glory" *before* he 'became a man.' Of course, existing with the Father before the world "was" does not have to mean that he was eternal, for even the angels, the other "sons of God," existed with God "before the world was" (Job 38:7). The difference between these "sons" and Jesus is that it is not said that the other "sons of God" possessed the same "glory" that Jesus possessed and subsequently gave up when he became a man.

The NT presents Jesus as one who is 'exactly' like God (Hebrews 1:3), and as one who gave it up to become a man, indeed, the "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45). Jesus was faithful until death and so God exalted him with the "name that is above every name." In this way, Jesus has "become better than the angels," that is, "to the extent that he has inherited a name more excellent than theirs" (Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:4). Jesus

¹⁷ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 165.

was exalted after he ascended to “*where he was before*” (Greek: *hopou* [“where”] *en* [“he was”] *to proteron* [“before”]).—John 6:62; compare Acts 1:9.

There are other NT texts that also clearly teach that Jesus enjoyed a real, personal preexistence before coming to earth as a man. Though I will discuss John 8:58 in greater detail later in this chapter, the account in John 8:54-58 impressively reveals Jesus’ personal preexistence in several ways. Consider the following exchange between the Jews and Jesus of Nazareth from John 8:52-59 (NWT):

The Jews said to him: “Now we do know you have a demon. Abraham died, also the prophets; but you say, ‘If anyone observes my word, he will never taste death at all.’ You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died, are you? Also, the prophets died. Who do you claim to be?” Jesus answered: “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifies me, he who YOU say is YOUR God; and yet YOU have not known him. But I know him. And if I said I do not know him I should be like YOU, a liar. But I do know him and am observing his word. Abraham YOUR father rejoiced greatly in the prospect of seeing my day, and he saw it and rejoiced.” Therefore the Jews said to him: “You are not yet fifty years old, and still you have seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them: “Most truly I say to YOU, Before Abraham came into existence, I have been.” Therefore they picked up stones to hurl [them] at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple.

I have underlined three parts of the above account. They are:

Verse 56: “*Abraham YOUR father rejoiced greatly in the prospect of seeing my day, and he saw it and rejoiced.*” Here Jesus talks about the reaction of Abraham upon ‘seeing his day.’ Jesus says that Abraham “saw it” and then “rejoiced.” But there is no account in the Bible that records any such emotion by Abraham upon seeing the “day” of the Messiah. It is clear, then, that Jesus is looking back to a time *when he saw Abraham rejoice!* This is so clearly the meaning of his own personal reflection on the emotions Abraham displayed, that the Jews responded to Jesus with the next underlined portion of the account:

Verse 57: *“You have seen Abraham?”* Those to whom Jesus spoke reveal by their question here that they understood Jesus to be reflecting on something he saw personally, namely, Abraham’s rejoicing. Jesus’ expressed reflection on Abraham’s emotions shows that he had a real, personal preexistence in which he actually ‘saw Abraham rejoicing.’ If Jesus did indeed ‘see Abraham,’ and if that is in fact how Jesus knew that Abraham had “rejoiced,” then there is no question that Jesus here claimed a personal, prehuman preexistence. That is also how the Jews understood him, and Jesus’ response in verse 58 leaves no room for doubt about just what he claimed.

Verse 58: *“Before Abraham came into existence, I have been.”* I will discuss the translation of this text and the meaning of Jesus’ words as it relates to modern Trinitarian arguments later in this chapter. But where it concerns our discussion of real versus “ideal” preexistence, Jesus here not only reflected on his personal observation of Abraham’s emotions prior to Jesus’ human birth (verse 56), not only did the Jews clearly understand that this is what Jesus meant by what he said (verse 57), but in answering their question about his age and how he could possibly have “seen Abraham,” Jesus states in the clearest terms possible that “before Abraham was born” Jesus existed. *That* is how Jesus was able to witness Abraham rejoicing though he himself was not even fifty (human) years old. Again, just how long that existence was based on what Jesus said here in verse 58 will be discussed later in this chapter. But this account establishes, along with the other NT texts cited above, that Jesus existed not only before his own human birth but even “before Abraham was born.”

Buzzard and Hunting completely miss the importance of Jesus’ reflection on the emotional reaction of Abraham, his ‘rejoicing.’ They simply make no comment at all on how Jesus’ reflection on Abraham’s expression of joy triggers the Jews’ question, “How have you seen Abraham?” The significance of Jesus’ final answer in John 8:58 is also missed by Buzzard and Hunting, for they claim that Jesus’ answer in John 8:58 only involves being “the Messiah appointed from eternity,” or possibly that “he may be stating his superiority to Abraham in another sense.” That ‘other sense’ is the personal, prehuman existence

Jesus claims here which means he is older than even Abraham, whom the Jews claimed as their “father.”—John 8:39.

Buzzard and Hunting leave the Jews’ question unanswered (“How is it that you have *seen* Abraham?”) and in so doing they avoid having to deal with the reflection of Jesus on the time when he experienced Abraham’s ‘rejoicing’ after Abraham ‘saw Jesus’ day.’ Based on the account itself, it appears that Jesus clearly did answer their question in verse 58, but even leaving that verse open for now there is no question that Jesus did ‘see’ Abraham “rejoice” based on what Jesus says in verse 56. ‘Seeing’ Abraham ‘rejoice’ would have to mean that Jesus was really alive before he came to earth, and that during his prehuman existence he ‘saw Abraham.’ Therefore, biblically, “ideal” preexistence has no support at all when it comes to the existence of Jesus of Nazareth.

Foreknowledge versus preexistence. The Bible also speaks in clear terms about the plan or foreknowledge of God as it concerns many things, including the coming of the Messiah. But foreknowledge as part of God’s plan is not what spoken of in John 1:1, 14, 3:13, 17:5, 8:52-59, or in Philippians 2:5-9 where it concerns Jesus’ existence. In spite of acknowledging that “there is a huge difference between being predestined or foreordained and actually preexisting,”¹⁸ Buzzard and Hunting argue that the “preexistence” statements in the New Testament “really have to do with foreordination and predestination.”¹⁹

While I agree with Buzzard and Hunting that there is a “huge difference” between real preexistence and foreknowledge, there are no good reasons for claiming that when the Bible speaks of Jesus’ personal preexistence that it is really speaking of God’s foreknowledge. If what Buzzard and Hunting say concerning the NT and its “preexistence” and foreordination statements is true (namely, that the latter really have only to do with the former), then in the NT and even throughout the Bible we should find very little difference between any “preexistence” statements and what is said concerning God’s “foreordination and predestination,” at

¹⁸ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 161.

¹⁹ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 160.

least where Jesus is concerned. If on the other hand there is a clear difference found in the Bible between these two subjects, then that difference should be taught and maintained by those who accept the Bible's teaching as true.

In texts such as John 1:1, 14, 3:13, 17:5, 8:52-59, and Philippians 2:5-9, we read about some of the things Jesus did before he "became flesh." But none of these texts speak about what God 'foreknows.' None of these texts equate or associate God's foreknowledge with Jesus' preexistence, either. So the position argued for by Buzzard and Hunting simply has no foundation. Their arguments merely take one subject (Jesus' personal preexistence) and they associate or equate it solely with another subject (God's foreknowledge) as if the two subjects (as presented in the Bible) are the same thing! While the Bible does speak of God's foreknowledge (for example, in 2 Timothy 1:9), this involves the provision Jah God made for the Christ once his sacrifice was needed in order to redeem humankind from Adam's sin.—Genesis 3:11-19.

That is why it is only *after* the fall of Adam and Eve that the promised "seed" of Genesis 3 is foretold. There is nothing in the Bible that teaches or that even suggests anything about such a "seed" being *eternally* a part of God's plan, or that any such "eternal" plan is what is meant by Jesus' saying that he existed before Abraham was born and, in fact, 'saw' him 'rejoice.' On the one hand we have Jesus speaking about what he 'saw' before he was born as a man, about his existence even "before Abraham was born." On the other hand we have Paul and other NT writers and biblical texts teaching us about things God foretold in advance, such as the coming of the Genesis 3 "seed." There are no good reasons to conclude that the two are the same.

In the Bible, Jesus' preexistence is always presented in terms that are real and personal, as the texts I considered earlier reveal. The prophecy about Jesus as the "seed" in Genesis 3:15 is not about the preexistence of someone in the "plan" of God *prior to* the event that gave rise to God's prophecy. In Genesis 3:15 and in other biblical texts that speak about the coming of the Messiah according to God's foreknowledge, we learn about the one whom

God chose to remove the Devil. Whether that “seed” was just a man or preexisted as one of God’s heavenly sons before coming to earth must be determined from the evidence that speaks to such things. When that is done, it is clear that Jesus existed in heaven in the form of God/a god before coming to the earth, that he “became flesh” and dwelt among us, and that he remembered things that happened before he became a man, events as far back as the days of Abraham when Jesus saw him ‘rejoice.’

The preexistence of the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha.

What about Jewish ideas concerning preexistence that are not found in the Bible? As we noted already in reviewing the account of John 8:52-59, Jesus’ Jewish enemies rejected his claim to have preexisted his human birth, a claim that involved his really having “seen Abraham.” While Christians do not depend on false beliefs that may be found outside of the Bible, we can learn about other Jewish beliefs that may have been circulating during the time parts of the Bible were being written. Then, as I did with Trinitarianism in Chapter 2, we can compare what we learn from any non-biblical sources to what the Bible explicitly teaches and determine if there is any meaningful agreement.

I have to this point attempted to show that there are good reasons for believing that the Bible teaches a real, personal prehuman existence for Jesus of Nazareth, as “the Word of God” (John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). As such, Jesus is the Son of God ‘through whom God made the systems of things,’ “the reflection of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of his very being, and he sustains all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). What, though, do we find in Jewish non-biblical literature (such as the Pseudepigrapha) when it comes to the preexistence of the Messiah? Is the preexistence taught here real, or only “ideal” in the sense of being part of God’s foreknowledge or “plan”?

Several texts can be used to show that even in non-biblical Jewish literature circulating prior to, during, and after the NT was written there was a belief in the “Son of man,” the Messiah, as a real and personally preexistent being. As I discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 164), in the book of 1 Enoch 48:3 we read about the

Son of Man who was “named” “before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars.” Now consider an extended portion of this account including some of its greater context, namely, 1 Enoch 46:1-3 and 48:2-6:

At that place, I saw the One to whom belongs the time before time. And his head was white like wool, and there was with him another individual, whose face was like that of a human being. His countenance was full of grace like that of one among the holy angels. And I asked the one—from among the angels—who was going with me, and who had revealed to me all the secrets regarding the One who was born of human beings, “Who is this, and from whence is he who is going as the prototype of the Before-Time?” And he answered me and said to me, “This is the Son of Man, to whom belongs righteousness, and with whom righteousness dwells. ... At that hour, that Son of Man was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits. He will become a staff for the righteous ones in order that they may lean on him and not fall. ... All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship him before him. ... For this purpose he became the Chosen One; he was concealed in the presence of (the Lord of the Spirits) prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity.”²⁰

Here we read that “prior to the creation of the world” a being “like that of one among the holy angels,” who is also called “the Son of Man” and the “prototype of the Before-Time,” was “given a name, in the presence of the Lord of Spirits.” This “Chosen One” is said to be “another individual” with “the One to whom belongs the time before time,” who is given honor and “worship” by all just like we read concerning Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11 and in Hebrews 1:6 (see Chapter 5 for more on “worshipping” Jesus according to the Bible). In his dissertation on preexistence in early Judaism, Robert Hamerton-Kelly comments on the above passages from 1 Enoch:

²⁰ E. Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, James H. Charlesworth, ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), pages 34-35 (underlining added).

These texts obviously teach that the Son of Man existed in heaven before He was to be manifested on earth: He was named beside God in heaven (46:1); His name was named (48:2 and 3) and He was hidden with God before the creation. The statement that the Son of Man was both named and hidden before creation leaves no doubt that He was thought to have existed before creation, whether naming implies bringing into existence or not. ... T.W. Manson's objections, therefore, miss the point completely. Focusing attention on the 'naming,' he believes that there is no evidence of a belief in the 'pre-mundane existence' of the Son of Man; rather evidence of a 'pre-mundane election.' He concludes, "pre-mundane election does not necessarily involve pre-mundane existence except as a project in the mind of God." But the 'naming' is not the act which brings the Son of Man into existence, rather it implies that He already is in existence. The text, in fact, tells of the pre-mundane election of a pre-existent being, who, since he is also to be 'hidden' certainly exists outside God's mind. ... There can be no serious doubt, therefore, that the Son of Man was a pre-mundane, pre-existent, heavenly being, who was reserved in heaven until the appropriate time for the exercise of His office as eschatological judge and king.²¹

Similarly, in the book of 4 Ezra (late first century CE) God speaks of a time when "my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him" (7:28). But in 13:52 God says that "no one on earth can see my Son or those who are with him, except in the time of his day," which implies that those in heaven may see him during the time in which he is "kept" by God (4 Ezra 12:32; 13:26; compare 1 Enoch 62:7). Especially clear on the subject of the real preexistence of God's Son is 4 Ezra 14:7-9, where God speaks to Ezra with these words:

And now I say to you: Lay up in your heart the signs that I have shown you, the dreams that you have seen, and the interpretations that you have heard; for you shall be taken up

²¹ Robert Gerald Hamerton-Kelly, "The Idea of Pre-Existence in Early Judaism: A Study in the Background of New Testament Theology" (Th.D. dissertation: Union Theological Seminary, 1966), pages 67, 68-69, 70 (underlining added).

from among men, and henceforth you shall live with my Son and with those who are like you, until the times are ended.²²

There is more than one view of preexistence expressed in non-biblical Jewish literature from around the first century BCE to the first century CE, however. But among these views is the belief that “the Son of Man was created before the world” and is therefore assigned “pre-mundane existence.”²³ Ironically, though Buzzard and Hunting criticize others for approaching “basic biblical issues with an entrenched Greek outlook on life,”²⁴ the very view they espouse (namely, “ideal” preexistence) is “quasi-Platonic”!²⁵ While “ideal” preexistence can be found in Jewish apocalyptic literature concerning certain things, neither in this literature nor in the NT is quasi-Platonic, “ideal” preexistence anywhere linked with the preexistence of the Son of Man. In both, the Son of Man is a truly preexistent being who came to the earth as the Messiah, the Christ of God.

Some additional discussion of Jesus as a preexistent being will be provided in Chapter 4, where it concerns John 1:1. Also, in Chapter 5 I will discuss Jesus’ identity as the “Wisdom” of Proverbs 8, which “Wisdom” there and in other biblical and non-biblical Jewish texts is said to have enjoyed a preexistence that is “exactly the same as that attributed to the Son of Man in the ‘Parables of Enoch.’”²⁶ Jesus’ prehuman existence will also be considered further later in this chapter as it relates to John 8:58. Now I will discuss how by means of the Greek expression *ego eimi* (“I am”) Jesus’ identity is revealed in the NT as “the Christ,” the “Son of Man” who “descended from heaven.”—John 3:13.

²² All translations of 4 Ezra are from B.M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, pages 517-559 (underlining added).

²³ Hamerton-Kelly, “The Idea of Pre-Existence in Early Judaism,” page 77. See also pages 76-77 for his summary of the five different forms of preexistence found in Jewish apocalyptic literature.

²⁴ Buzzard and Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, page 161.

²⁵ Hamerton-Kelly, “The Idea of Pre-Existence in Early Judaism,” page 80.

²⁶ Hamerton-Kelly, “The Idea of Pre-Existence in Early Judaism,” page 125.

***Ego Eimi* and Jesus as “the Christ”**

The use of the words ἐγὼ εἰμι (*ego eimi*, “I am”), particularly in John’s Gospel, has attracted much attention among scholars and Bible students alike. Some argue that the use of these words by Jesus (or by John for Jesus) have a relationship to similar expressions used by Jah himself in the LXX of Isaiah. Many Trinitarian scholars argue that the use of these words by both Jah God in the OT and by Jesus in the NT associates and identifies these two in some sense consistent with the Trinity doctrine. Jehovah’s Witnesses disagree.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that rather than identify Jesus as “God” or as a “person” of a triune God, the expression *ego eimi* should be interpreted according to each context in which it is used, and that when this is done then the identity involved with or the function of *ego eimi* is (for Jesus) more messianic than anything else. The expression *ego eimi* is also used as a means of simple self-identification (“It is I”), and in one instance (John 8:58) it is used differently (at least in part) than it is used in any other NT text. In this section I will discuss the use of *ego eimi* by Jesus in those NT texts (except for John 8:58, which will be discussed later this chapter) where his use of “I am” is not completed by a predicate, and also provide good reasons for how this use of *ego eimi* should be understood.

When the use of “I am” is not completed by a predicate (and, so, “predicateless”), it means there is no explicit noun or image (such as “the light of the world” [John 8:12]) directly following the “I am” (*ego eimi*) statement. When *ego eimi* has no such expressed predicate grammatically associated with the “I am” statement, then it is complete in itself (“absolute,” in that it requires no stated predicate), or there *is* a predicate that, while not grammatically linked to the expression, is to be supplied from the context. In the latter instances, *ego eimi* is understandable only when a predicate can be supplied by the context of the statement. In the former case, *ego eimi* has meaning that is clear and understood without having to supply a predicate from the context to complete the “I am” statement.

John's Gospel contains a total of nine instances where *ego eimi* is used by Jesus without an expressed predicate (John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-6, 8). I will consider each text and then present good reasons supporting the predicate I believe should be used or understood with *ego eimi* in each of the cited texts. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) also use the expression *ego eimi* with and without an expressed predicate. Later in this chapter I will show that the best evidence supports the belief that the use of *ego eimi* in the Synoptics is parallel to the use of *ego eimi* in John, in that a predicate should be supplied from the context, except for perhaps the use of *ego eimi* in John 8:58. Again, because of its unique features in comparison to other *ego eimi* texts in John and in the Synoptics, John 8:58 will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

John 4:26. We begin with John 4:26. Here Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman and says, "I who am speaking to you am he" (Ἐγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι, *Ego eimi, ho lalon soi*). To what, though, are Jesus' words a response? Prior to verse 26 Jesus had astounded the woman with his knowledge concerning her true marital status (verses 15-18). Because of this, the woman says to Jesus, "I perceive you are a prophet" (verse 19). Jesus then explains that salvation originates with the Jews, and that eventually true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth (verses 21-23). The woman responds to Jesus with the words: "I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ. Whenever that one arrives, he will declare all things to us openly." It is to these words that Jesus responds in verse 26, "I who am speaking to you am he."

Therefore, it would seem to be rather obvious that the predicate to be supplied from the context, specifically from verse 25, is "Messiah" or "Christ." Jesus responds by identifying himself as the one in whom the woman had expressed hope, as the one who would someday make all things clear respecting God's will. Edwin Freed makes the following observation regarding Jesus' use of *ego eimi* in John 4:26:

Certainly one way, if not the only correct way, to convey the meaning of the Greek *ego eimi* in this context is to understand *messias/christos* of the sentence before it as the predicate with which *ho lalon soi* is in apposition. In contrast to the Baptist's negative stagement [*sic*], Jesus is reported as affirming his messiahship through the use of *ego eimi*.²⁷

The Samaritan woman evidently understood Jesus' response as a positive claim to be the Messiah (John 4:29, 42). So we can see that John uses the predicateless *ego eimi* early on in his Gospel as a means of identifying Jesus as the Christ, as the sent-forth one of God.²⁸ William Loader comments, "In 4:26 Jesus identifies himself with the Messiah, just as, by contrast John the Baptist had rejected such an identity for himself with the words, 'I am not' in 1:21."²⁹ Meyer also speaks rightly concerning the use of *ego eimi* in this verse, "I am He, i.e. the Messiah, ver. 2[6], the simple Greek expression, and not in imitation of Deut. xxxii. 39,"³⁰ where the LXX uses *ego eimi* with an understood predicate for Jah's identity as the only true God (see note 34 below).

However, David Mark Ball is convinced that there is such a connection. In his study on the "I am" statements of Jesus, Ball does admit that in John 4:26 "Jesus declares that he is the messiah for whom she [the Samaritan woman] waits," and that "Jesus makes a claim about his identity; he is the messiah." "But," Ball asks, "is this all that this 'I am' saying signifies for

²⁷ Edwin D. Freed, "Ego Eimi in John 1:20 and 4:25," *CBQ* 41 (1979), page 290.

²⁸ Earlier John had used *ego eimi* in connection with the identification of the Messiah. In Joh 1:19 priests and Levites sent by the Jews ask John the Baptist, "Who are you?" He replies in verse 20, Ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ Χριστός (*Ego ouk eimi ho Christos*, "I am not the Christ"). This denial is later repeated in a slightly different form in Joh 3:28, Οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ὁ Χριστός (*Ouk eimi ego ho Christos*, "I am not the Christ"). Freed notes that the "Baptist's denial that he is the Christ, in the negative form of *ego eimi*, is part of his positive testimony that is to follow" (Freed, "Ego Eimi in John 1:20 and 4:25," page 289).

²⁹ William Loader, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Structures and Issues*, 2d ed. (New York: Lang, 1992), page 79.

³⁰ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of John*, trans. William Urwick (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), page 159.

Jesus' identity?"³¹ In answer, Ball points to the verbal analogies between this verse and Isaiah 52:6 (LXX). I will here consider them side by side, with the Greek first and then the English translation (with bold and underlining added to parallel portions of each text):

John 4:26:

λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ἐγὼ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι.

Isaiah 52:6 (LXX):

διὰ τοῦτο γινώσεται ὁ λαός μου τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτὸς ὁ λαλῶν πάρειμι

John 4:26 (RSV):

Jesus said to her, "**I who speak to you am he.**"

Isaiah 52:6 (Brenton's translation):

Therefore shall my people know my name in that day, **for I am he that speaks:** I am present.

After making a similar comparison, Ball concludes:

If the phrasing of Jesus' words is meant to direct the reader to Isaiah, then Jesus' claim to messiahship should be interpreted not only in the context of a debate with the Samaritan woman, but also in the context of Isaiah 52. ... When Jesus says, 'I am he who speaks,' he thus takes the words of Yahweh and applies them to himself. ... Through the ἐγὼ εἰμι of 4.26, Jesus' identity as messiah is therefore qualified by the phrase in which it is uttered. It is the whole phrase, and not only the words ἐγὼ εἰμι (*ani hu*), which points the reader to the Isaianic passage, which in turn defines what is meant by messiahship. ... *Jesus' identity as messiah is therefore an identity which includes an identification with Yahweh.*³²

That Jesus and Jah in contexts where their identity is under discussion (or being revealed) should use similar language is not at all surprising. The real question has to do with whether the

³¹ David Mark Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel* (JSNTSup 124; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), page 179.

³² Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, pages 179-180 (emphasis added).

revealed identities are the same. There is nothing in the context of Isaiah 52:6 to suggest that the one speaking is the Messiah and, conversely, there is nothing in the context of John 4:26 to suggest that the speaker is Jah, other than the use of similar language where it concerns the identity of “the one speaking.” In fact, there are many differences to which one could point that would suggest that the revealed identities are *not* the same.

For example, in the context of Isaiah 52:6 Jah reminds the Israelites it is “he,”³³ “the Sovereign Lord Jehovah” (verse 4), who is speaking. Jah then speaks in such a way so that the Israelites are mindful of the seriousness of his words and of the need to respond to him. In John 4:26 Jesus’ words are an affirmation of his identity as the one in whom the woman expressed faith, namely, the “Messiah.” The Samaritan woman could not possibly have detected an identification between Jesus and Jah because of Jesus’ use here of “I am he.”³⁴ Samaritans did

³³ Here the predicate “He” (αὐτός) is found in the text of the LXX, but it is not stated explicitly in Joh 4:26.

³⁴ Jesus could have said *’ani hu* (Hebrew for “I am he”), which John could then have translated into the Greek *ego eimi*. Again, it is not a question of using the same means of identification in Hebrew, in Aramaic, or in Greek. The question is, what is the identity of the person speaking? In Isa 41:4 *’ani hu* (“I [am] he”) is used to refer back to the one who had just previously been mentioned (“Jehovah”), while in the LXX *ego eimi* refers back to the ἐγὼ θεός (*ego theos*, “I [am] God”) of the same verse. In Isa 43:10-13, in verse 10 *’ani hu/ego eimi* stands without an expressed predicate but the predicate is expressed in verse 11, where the divine name follows the archaic form of *’ani* (namely, *’anoki*, “I”). In verse 12 *’el* (“God”) follows *’ani*. Israel is reminded that Jah alone is God, not the idol gods of the nations. It is Jah God who has proved to be a living God, one who has brought deliverance for his people (Isa 43:1-9). Thus, at the end of verse 12 Jah says, “‘You are my witnesses,’ says Jehovah, ‘and I am God’” (Hebrew: *’ani ’el*; LXX: κύριος ὁ θεός, “the Lord God” [some manuscripts add ἐγὼ (*ego*), “I,” before “Lord”]). Verse 13 (NWT) begins by saying, “Also, all the time I am the same One [*’ani hu*].” Again the predicate *’el* (“God”) is supplied by the context. The LXX reads ἐτι ἂν ἀρχῆς (“even from the beginning”), showing that God has always been what he now claims to be. The NWT correctly translates the Hebrew as “I am the same One.” H.W.F. Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2d Eng. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), page 437, note 1, writes:

The separate pronouns,—apart from their employment as the subject in noun-clauses ... [are used in] the sense of the same (ὁ αὐτός [*ho autos*; when used in the attributive position, the Greek third person personal pronoun is translated “same” and is, thus, an adjective.]) or (one and) the same, [*hu*] is used in Is. 41:4, 43:10, 13; 46:4, 48:12 (always [*’ani hu*]).

Philip B. Harner, *The "I AM" of the Fourth Gospel: A Study of Johannine Usage and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), page 7, note 5, par. 2, agrees that the LXX reflects this understanding at one point (in Isa 52:6) where the LXX translates *'ani hu* as *ego eimi autos* ("I am he"). Compare Lu 24:39, where *ego eimi autos* is used for the same purpose (identity), though the identity is revealed not simply by the words *ego eimi autos*, but because Jesus' words are completed by a predicate ("Jesus") which is implied through his reference to the wound marks from his execution. In Isa 43:25 *'ani hu/ego eimi* identifies God as the one who wipes out transgressions; Isa 51:12 tells us that Jah is the one comforting the people; and Isa 52:6 emphasizes that the people will know God's name because he is the one speaking and the one who will cause what he says to happen (compare Eze 20:4). Regarding Brown's claim that Isa 43:25 should be understood as meaning, "I am 'I AM' who blots out transgressions," a translation which sees the second *ego eimi* as a divine name (*The Gospel According to John* (i-xii) [AB 29; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966], page 536), Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), page 85, writes:

Brown insists that the doubling of the 'I am' in the Septuagint translation of Isa. 43:25, 'I, I am he who blots out your transgressions': ἐγὼ εἰμι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἔξάλειψον ... means that the second 'I am' is a declaration of the divine name. In other words, God declares, 'I am "I am" (= divine name), who blots out your transgressions.' Were there evidence that elsewhere 'I am' is the divine name, this would be a possible, but not a necessary reading of the Septuagint of Isa. 43:25 (and cf. Isa. 51:12). Without such evidence, however, Brown's suggestion is merely fanciful, an attempt to find later Catholic christological doctrine in the Fourth Gospel. The only evidence from Scripture which he cites in support of his case is the Septuagint of Isa. 52:6, 'Therefore my people should know *my name*, because I am he, who speaks (ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτὸς ὁ λαλῶν); I am here (πάρειμι).' Brown interprets 'my name' and 'I am' as parallel expressions which should be identified, but if 'I am' is a name in the second clause, it is impossible to translate, since a verb not a name is required. Lindars rightly rejects Brown's argument as unconvincing (1972: 336). He points out that if Jesus' ἐγὼ εἰμι in 8:58 is to be understood as a name, the statement should read 'Before Abraham was, I am "I am."' It is better, as in the case of Isa. 52:6, to allow ἐγὼ εἰμι its verbal force.

As for Isa 46:4, in this account Jah highlights the fact that unlike the idols of Bel and Nebo who have not been able to deliver their worshipers, he is the same one who has been with them "from the belly" (verse 3), and who will continue to be with them until the days of their "grey-headedness." Jah here emphasizes his identity as the same one who provided escape for the Israelites long ago (Isa 46:9). Thus, *'ani hu/ego eimi* is again used as a means of self-identification, and the self identified is again made clear by the context. That is why it does not necessarily matter what Jesus *said*, that is, what words he used to reveal his identity. What matters is *the identity* that he chose to reveal. For a discussion of whether or not Jesus actually taught in Greek on this and other occasions, see Stanley E. Porter, *Studies in the Greek New Testament: Theory and Practice* (SBG 6; New York: Peter Lang, 1996), pages 139-171. But note P.M. Casey's objections to Porter's view, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" *ExpT* 108.11 (1997), pages 326-328. See also Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pages 167-170. For a discussion of the possible Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds to the

not accept Isaiah or any other writings except for the Pentateuch as canonical.

The “messianism” of the Samaritans was centered on the prophet greater than Moses referred to in Deuteronomy 18, which figure is *not*, in that account, identified as Jah himself. Rather, Jah will command this prophet what to speak in his name (Deuteronomy 18:18; compare John 12:49-50). Further, in John 4:26 there is no reason to read into the rather common participle ὁ λαλῶν (*ho lalon*, “the one speaking”) any “identification with Yahweh,” as Ball suggests. John simply uses *ego eimi* in the same way the LXX of Isaiah uses it: for self-identification. The use of *ho lalon* is quite at home in both contexts, but where two different yet significant identities are highlighted or revealed.

Again, the fact that Jesus and his Father are presented as using the same language in similar contexts (particularly where their unique identities are in question) is not surprising at all (compare John 14:10; 12:49-50). But the revealed *identities* in John 4:26 and Isaiah 52:6 are not the same. Indeed, in John 4:26 “it is probable that this is one of the cases where, although the predicate is not expressed, it is implied in the context: ‘I that talk to you am the Christ.’”³⁵ In fact, Freed calls John 4:26 “the clue for understanding all other passages where the words [*ego eimi*] occur.”³⁶ I will now consider these “other passages.”

John 6:20. In John 6:20 Jesus strengthens his disciples with the words, “I am [he]; do not be afraid” (Ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε). How should we here understand Jesus’ use of *ego eimi*? Why were the disciples afraid of Jesus in the first place? Prior to verse 20 the disciples had boarded a boat and set out across the sea for Capernaum (verse 17). It had become dark and the sea was rough due to a strong wind (verse 18). After traveling about three or four miles across the Sea of Galilee, they suddenly beheld Jesus

Johannine “I am” statements, see Harner, *The “I Am” of the Fourth Gospel*, pages 17-30; Ball, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, pages 24-32, 36-39.

³⁵ J.H. Bernard and A.H. McNeile, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), page 151.

³⁶ Edwin D. Freed, “*EGO EIMI* in John VIII. 24 in the Light of Its Context and Jewish Messianic Belief,” *JTS* 33 (1982), page 163.

crossing the water toward their boat “and they became fearful” (verse 19). The parallel accounts in Matthew (14:27) and in Mark (6:50) also record Jesus responding to the disciples with the words, *ego eimi*. But Matthew and Mark add a bit more which helps us understand why the disciples were so fearful.

Both Matthew and Mark record the disciples' reaction upon seeing Jesus approach them by writing, “It is an apparition!” This was apparently the only way they could account for seeing a man walk across the water toward their boat. In light of this additional information, it is easy to see how *ego eimi* serves as a means of simple self-identification. Knowing their fear, Jesus assures them, “It is [I], not a ghost [spirit].”³⁷ Again, what we have here “is simply an identification, ‘It is I/me.’”³⁸ Painter also points out that while there is something significant in the frequent use of *ego eimi* in John, various examples where God as a speaker reveals himself using *ʾani hu* (“I [am] he”) “do not provide a basis for interpreting the Johannine use because in all of these instances it is clear that God is the speaker, ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other.’”³⁹ This is similar to my earlier conclusions regarding Jah's use of this and of other, similar expressions in the OT (see note 34).

After reviewing the various uses of *ʾani hu/ego eimi* in the OT and in the NT, I believe that these words are used for the same basic purpose: self-identification. The identity revealed may be simple (“It is I”) or unique (“I am Jehovah”; “I am the Messiah”; “I am the man who was born blind” [John 9:9]). Ball, however, believes that when Jesus said, “have no fear” (μὴ φοβεῖσθε, *me phobeisthe*), “he speaks not just as their friend but also speaks the words of the LORD.”⁴⁰ Ball says this because there are several passages in the LXX where the negative Greek

³⁷ Loader, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, page 79. Compare Lu 24:37, where Jesus appeared in a locked room and the disciples became frightened, “imagining they beheld a spirit.” But Jesus replies to them in verse 39 by referring to his physical features and by saying, “I am he [ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτός].”

³⁸ John Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), page 227.

³⁹ Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah*, page 227.

⁴⁰ Ball, *‘I Am’ in John’s Gospel*, page 185.

particle *μή* (*me*) and the verb “to fear” (*phobeisthai*) are also used by God. Ball even cites several examples where this combination is used with *ego eimi* (Genesis 26:24; 46:3; Jeremiah 1:8, 17; 46:28 [26:28 in the LXX]; compare Isaiah 41:10). But none of these texts use *ego eimi* absolutely; a predicate of some kind is needed to complete its meaning. Further, not one of these texts has a contextual similarity with John 6:20, where we find confusion over someone’s identity and where the words used could simply mean, “It is I.”

Also unique in the case of John 6:20 is the effect Jesus’ words have in easing the disciples’ fear about what they beheld, that is, whether ‘it is he’ (Jesus) or “an apparition” (Mark 6:49). While Abbott thinks the meaning may be “I am the Christ [or ‘Deliverer’]” in harmony with the use of *ego eimi* in Mark 13:6,⁴¹ Ball believes that “no predicate can be supplied from the context of Jn. 6.20.”⁴² There is nothing in this particular context of John 6:20 that immediately suggests a predicate such as “Christ,” unless Abbott is correct in saying that *ego eimi* in this verse corresponds to the meaning “derived through the LXX and Hebraic sources [and, I might add, through the use in the Synoptics (see below)]—‘I am the Saviour, or Deliverer.’”⁴³

If this is the correct understanding of Jesus’ use of *ego eimi* in John 6:20, then Jesus’ words have clear messianic associations which during the actual event (a violent sea storm) would have undoubtedly provided comfort and security for his frightened followers. This is also a reasonable conclusion in view of John’s regular use of *ego eimi* in contexts where matters relating to the Messiah or Christ are under discussion. This was clearly evident, for example, in John 4:26. Below I will show that such a usage is also clear in most if not in every single other NT use of *ego eimi* in John’s Gospel, as well as in Matthew’s, in Mark’s, and in Luke’s Gospels.

⁴¹ E.A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), pages 182-183; compare Matt 24:5. For a discussion of Matt 24:5 and Mark 13:6, see my discussion in the next section.

⁴² Ball, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel*, page 185.

⁴³ Abbott, *Johannine Grammar*, page 183.

There are some who believe “we are intended in [John 6:20] to recall the coming of God to the Israelites in their peril at the Red Sea.”⁴⁴ Yet, in evaluating the use of *ego eimi* I believe the best available reasons support the conclusion here that we have *ego eimi* used for self-identification, equivalent to, “It is I,” or, “It is me, Jesus, not an apparition.” This seems particularly justified in view of the parallel accounts in Matthew and in Mark, where the disciples are concerned about whether Jesus is “an apparition” to which the reply, “It is I,” would seem most natural if his intent was to eliminate their confusion about his identity in this particular instance where they were confused.

Ball, however, believes Jesus' words convey both simple identification (“It is I”) and “identity which involves intimate identification with the words and deeds of God.” According to Ball, unless you accept both of these meanings in Jesus' use of “I am” in John 6:20, you will not understand just who Jesus really is.⁴⁵ Yet, Jesus' own disciples apparently understood what he said, and they thereafter identified Jesus as “God's Son,” not as God himself (Matthew 14:33). There is also nothing *explicit* in the context of John 6:20 to suggest Jesus was identifying himself “with the words and deeds of God.” Jesus appears concerned only with easing his disciples' fears in what is clearly an unusual context, one where they believed he was actually an apparition.

John 8:24, 28. In John 8 there is a heated exchange between Jesus and the Jews while Jesus is teaching in the temple. In verse 23 Jesus tells them: “You are from the realms below; I am from the realms above. You are from this world; I am not from this world.” Jesus continues in verse 24, saying, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe [πιστεύσητε, *pisteusete*] that I am he [*ego eimi*]” (RSV). This is the first of three occurrences of *ego eimi* without an expressed predicate in the eighth chapter of John. But how are we to understand the use of *ego eimi* in verse 24?

⁴⁴ G. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Themes: John* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), pages 40-41.

⁴⁵ Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, page 185.

According to Harner, it is used here with a double meaning. Harner believes that *ego eimi* is used in John 8:24 in an absolute sense (or in some sense complete in itself), “signifying the unity of the Son and the Father.” Harner also argues that the use of *ego eimi* here allows for some predicate to be mentally supplied by Jesus’ hearers. But Harner cannot say for sure just what predicate they may have had in mind, particularly in view of their question, “Who are you?” in verse 25.⁴⁶

The use of *ego eimi* in this verse does not appear to have anything to do with a “unity of the Son and the Father.” Though Jesus spoke of his relationship with the Father when he said, “he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him” (verse 26, RSV), this is not “a further commentary on this meaning [that is, the meaning Harner here sees in *ego eimi*, which allegedly signifies a unity between the Father and the Son] of the phrase.” Jesus appears to be continuing his conversation with the Jews and in the process he is revealing further details about himself and about his relationship with the Father. These additional details do not necessarily serve as a “commentary”⁴⁷ on a particular phrase (*ego eimi*) Jesus had just used.

As with John 4:26, Freed sees the *ego eimi* of John 8:24 as a reference to “Jesus’ Messiahship.”⁴⁸ Freed writes: “There is probably no better reason for believing that the words refer to Jesus as the Christ than to consider them in the light of the author’s stated purpose for writing his gospel: ‘These [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [πιστεύοντες, *pisteuontes*] you may have life in his name’ (xx. 31). Belief in Jesus Christ is necessary for salvation. In viii. 24 that proposition of faith is emphatically and categorically stated.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Harner, *The “I AM” of the Fourth Gospel*, pages 43-44.

⁴⁷ Harner, *The “I AM” of the Fourth Gospel*, page 43.

⁴⁸ Freed, “*EGO EIMI* in John VIII. 24,” page 163.

⁴⁹ Freed, “*EGO EIMI* in John VIII. 24,” pages 163-164. In the quote from Joh 20:31, Freed supplies the bracketed word “signs” while I have added the Greek for “believing,” showing the verbal relationship between Joh 8:24 and 20:31. On page 167 of his article, Freed concludes: “In John viii. 24 the words *ego eimi* reveal John’s

There are other reasons for associating Jesus' use of *ego eimi* in John 8:24 with his identity as the Messiah. Indeed, Jesus himself speaks about how the Jews would die in their sins unless they "believe" in him, which certainly recalls the messianic descriptions of Isaiah 53:11-12 (with underlining added):

By means of his knowledge the righteous one, my servant, will bring a righteous standing to many people; and their errors he himself will bear. ... and he himself carried the very sin of many people, and for the transgressors he proceeded to interpose.

Additionally, in Daniel 9:24-25 there is a prophecy about the time when "Messiah the Leader" would appear. This is directly linked with the finishing off of "sin" and with "atonement for error." So unless the Jews 'believed' in Jesus as the Messiah who would indeed 'carry their sin' then they would 'die in their sins,' and that is what Jesus tells them in John 8:24. As Freed writes, "When Jesus thrice stated that the Jews would die in their sins unless they believed that *ego eimi*, he was doing only what the Messiah was expected to do—reprove sinners."⁵⁰

In John 8:24 we have yet another reference to Jesus as the Messiah from God revealed or associated with his use of the phrase *ego eimi*. As Godet rightly points out, the "understood predicate was certainly *the Christ*."⁵¹ This same meaning seems

unique concept of Jesus as the Messiah. Unless the Jews believe in the Messiah, they will die in their sins."

⁵⁰ Freed, "EGO EIMI in John VIII. 24," page 164.

⁵¹ F. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, vol. 2 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), page 98. Harner (*The "I Am" of the Fourth Gospel*, page 44, note 77) criticizes M.-J. Lagrange, (*Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 7th ed. [Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1948], page 236) for seeing a reference to the Messiah in Joh 8:24, stating that such a conclusion is "without any basis in the text." However, in view of the clear contextual evidence to the contrary, as well as the use of *ego eimi* in Joh 4:26, I contend that it is Harner's observation that is "without any basis." That the Jews should ask Jesus in verse 25, "Who are you?" is surely no surprise given their tendency to misunderstand the meaning of Jesus' words (compare Joh 6:48-52; 8:21-22). They clearly did not understand Jesus to be claiming a divine name or title, for if they did then they would not have asked *who* he claimed to be! It would have been obvious by his use of *ego eimi*, that is, if he did in fact use *ego eimi* as a divine title. Jesus' words in verse 25 (Τὴν ἀρχὴν ὁ τι καὶ λαλῶ ὑμῖν, which have been variously translated as "What

clear two verses later in John 8:28, where Jesus continues his discussion with the Jews by saying, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he [*ego eimi*], and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me” (RSV). Harner believes in verse 28 *ego eimi* has a double meaning. He believes the phrase *ego eimi* has a self-contained (absolute) meaning involving unity between the Father and the Son, and Harner also believes it is associated with the predicate “Son of man” found in the very same verse.⁵²

There is no good reason to conclude *ego eimi* has a self-contained meaning of unity between the Father and the Son. True, in both verse 24 and verse 28 Jesus refers to his relationship with the Father, but Jesus often refers to his relationship with the Father using nearly the exact same words he uses here in John 8:28 (compare John 5:19, 30; 7:16-17; 12:49-50). Yet, *ego eimi* is not used in these texts. Also, shown earlier, Jesus uses *ego eimi* apart from any explicit mention of his relationship with the Father (see John 4:26; 6:20; compare John 18:5-6, 8 [discussed below]).

Indeed, there is nothing unusual about Jesus referring to himself as the Messiah and at the same time referencing his relationship with the Father in the same context. A reference to both Jesus’ identity and to his relationship with the Father in the same context, a context in which Jesus’ enemies are disputing with him over his identity and over the source of his teachings, does not depend on an “absolute” meaning for *ego eimi*, particularly where the absolute sense is not justified by the context in which *ego eimi* is used.

Ball, however, believes that both John 8:24 and 28 are to be interpreted in the light of Isaiah 43:10. In addition to the use of *ego eimi* in this OT LXX text, there are the verbs for “know” (γινώτε, *gnote*) and for “believe” (πιστεύετε, *pisteusete*), verbs

have I been saying to you [from] the beginning” [NASB], and “Just what I have been claiming all along” [NIV], or “Even what I have told you from the beginning” [RSV]), in response to the Jews’ question, show that he believed he had made his identity clear all along.—Compare Joh 10:24-26.

⁵² Harner, *The “I AM” of the Fourth Gospel*, page 44. Bernard and McNeile, *Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2, page 303, agree that the predicate for *ego eimi* is supplied from the preceding clause of the sentence, “the Son of Man.”

that are also used in John 8:24 (πιστεύσητε, *pisteusete*) and 28 (γνώσεσθε, *gnosesthe*). Therefore, Ball concludes:

The clause 'to know and believe that I am' thus carries with it an exclusive soteriological function which explain [*sic*: 'explains'] why Jesus can say that those who do not 'believe that I am' will die in their sins (8.24). In John Jesus has been given this exclusive soteriological function that in Isaiah was reserved for God alone (cf. Jn 3.17; 4.42; 10.9). Jesus can use the words ἐγὼ εἰμι [*ego eimi*] for himself in this way, because of his close identification with the Father; he does nothing on his own authority but speaks only as the Father has taught him (8.24). It is Jesus' exclusive role as the only begotten from the Father (1.14), the Logos who was in the beginning with God and was identified as God/god (1.1), the only one who has seen God (1.18) that allows him to use these words of himself.⁵³

While it may be true that John used terms from the LXX of Isaiah to express the "exclusive soteriological function" of Jesus (compare 1 John 4:14), the use of *ego eimi* in John 8:24 and 28 does not anywhere clearly suggest an "intimate identification of Jesus with the exclusive God of Isaiah."⁵⁴ That has to be read into the text and into the "soteriological function" of Jesus. The use of similar verb forms does not in and of itself establish any such "identification," because there is nothing unusual about the use of these particular verbs in two separate contexts where a significant person's identity is in dispute. If the identity is the same, then that must be clear from the context and not read into words and expressions that, by themselves, do not express any such thing.

In both Isaiah and in John we have before us questions about two very important individuals whom, when recognized, require belief on the part of those addressed in order to be saved through their "belief." In these respects the contexts and the terms used by both individuals are similar. But it is also true that the one in John comes "in the name of" the one spoken of in Isaiah; the speaker

⁵³ Ball, 'I Am' in John's Gospel, pages 190-191.

⁵⁴ Ball, 'I Am' in John's Gospel, page 191.

in Isaiah is the God of the speaker in John (Micah 5:4; John 5:43). They are not the same God, though one does express only the will and teachings of the other and so because the “one God, the Father” is “doing his works” through the Son they can be seen as the same or similar in many respects (John 6:38; 14:9-11). Therefore, while their similarities are clear, so are these and other significant differences, differences many scholars and critics of Jehovah’s Witnesses often minimize or ignore completely.

Also, if we are going to look for a verbal analogy between John 8:24, 28 and the LXX of Isaiah it may be that we are intended to recall the opening words of Isaiah 53, “Who has believed [ἐπίστευσεν] our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD [Jah] been revealed?” (NIV) This would certainly be more consistent with the context of John 8:24, where Jesus is revealed as the Messiah who would ‘bear the sins’ (Isaiah 53:4, 11) of the Jews if they ‘believe’ and accept him. There is also a verbal relationship between the use of ὑψόω (*hupso’o*, “lift up”) in John 8:28 and the use of the same verb in reference to the future Messiah in the LXX of Isaiah 52:13.⁵⁵

In the book of Isaiah, Jah nowhere calls for the Israelites to put faith in him as the Messiah who is spoken of in Isaiah 11:3-11 and in Isaiah Chapter 53. Rather, Jah is always the one whom the Messiah serves. It is the Messiah upon whom “the spirit of Jehovah must settle down, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of mightiness, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah,” and “there will be enjoyment by him in the fear of Jehovah” (Isaiah 11:2-3). The Messiah is not Jehovah. He serves Jah in ‘fear’ and is given Jah’s “wisdom,” his “understanding,” his “counsel,” his “mightiness,” his “knowledge,” and he ‘enjoys’ it. Jah is the one who “has caused the error of us all to meet up with that one” (Isaiah 53:6).

⁵⁵ For more on the verbal analogies between John’s presentation of Jesus as the Messiah and the book of Isaiah, see the Second Edition to this book, pages 174-177. For more on John 12:41, see my article, “Dr. James White and the Assumptions of Trinitarianism Revisited,” *Watching the Ministry* (August 1, 2011), as well as the links in it to other articles related to what Isaiah “saw” according to John 12:41. See also my *Elihu Online Papers* 4, “The ‘Glory’ ‘Seen’ by Isaiah According to John 12:41” (November 20, 2011).

They are not the same God, but one serves the other in such a way that he is 'God with us' (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

Further, Jah's words in Isaiah 43:12 (*'ani 'el*, "I [am] God") provide the predicate for the *'ani hu* ("I [am] he" [= *ego eimi*]) in verse 13.⁵⁶ There is nothing to suggest "God" as a predicate for *ego eimi* in John 8:24, or in verse 28. Ball on the other hand believes that "there is no predicate in the context [of 8:28] with which Jesus can be identified."⁵⁷ But this is hardly the case. Recognizing "Son of man" in verse 28 is at least a possible predicate for Jesus' "I am" statement, Ball provides the following three reasons for rejecting it:

- 1) It would obscure the connection with verse 24, and verse 28 must be (according to Ball) a deliberate echo of that verse.
- 2) Jesus never says directly, "I am the Son of man."

⁵⁶ In Hebrew, *hu* is a predicate ("he") and it can therefore stand in apposition to another predicate expressed or implied elsewhere in the context. *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1979), page 216 (5), says, "As an emph. predicate, of God, 'I am He.'" But this same lexicon's reference to "Who is" as further defining "I am He" does not show sensitivity to the context or to the implied predicate (see above, note 34, for a discussion of the *'ani hu* passages in Isaiah). On the other hand, Harner believes "the Septuagint translators evidently understood the pronoun *hu* as the functional equivalent of the copula verb, 'am,' 'is,' etc., and thus rendered *'ani hu* literally as *ego eimi*" (Harner, *The "I Am" of the Fourth Gospel*, page 7, note 5). I do not believe *hu* here functions as a copula in the Isaiah passages translated by *ego eimi*. Though such a usage can be seen in Hebrew and even more in Aramaic from the middle of the last millennium before the Christian era onward, the LXX translators seem to have recognized that *hu* stood in the place of another predicate (again, see note 34 above). The translators similarly appear to have recognized that the understood predicate would be identified and supplied by the reader after the copula verb (*eimi*). The LXX of Isa 52:6 seems to confirm that even if *hu* did serve as a copula, it was not used as such in every instance. The doubling of the pronoun in certain passages is not necessarily an indication that the second pronoun serves as a copula, either. With reference to Isa 43:11, 25, 51:12, and Deut 32:39, Francis I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (JBLMS 14; Nashville; New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), page 36, writes, "*'anoki 'anoki yahwe*, 'I, I am Yahweh'... the suspended pronoun is resumed by itself and is hardly a copula." Regarding Deut 32:39, Isa 43:11, 25, 48:15, 51:12, and Hosea 5:14, Paul Sanders (*The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* [OTS 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996], page 238) believes that the repetition of *'ani* "enhances the emphasis." The difference between *'anoki* and *'ani* is that the former is the archaic form of the latter.

⁵⁷ Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, page 188.

- 3) The “I am” statement of Jesus in the main clause of verse 28 stands on its own, without the need of a predicate to complete its meaning.

To understand “Son of man” in verse 28 as the predicate implied in Jesus’ “I am” statement in the same verse would not at all obscure a connection with verse 24. In fact, it would help *establish* the connection because the “I am” saying of verse 24 has a messianic meaning (as noted above), while the same is true for the title “Son of man.”⁵⁸ As for whether Jesus ever explicitly confesses, “I am the Son of man,” it must simply be replied that in the four Gospels Jesus refers to himself as the “Son of man” no less than seventy-eight (78) times,⁵⁹ and another five (5) times he is referred to as such by either Mark (8:31; 9:9), Stephen (Acts 7:56), or John (Revelation 1:13; 14:14). So we should not at all consider it unusual that we find Jesus identifying himself as the “Son of man” in John 8:28!

Freed, who also sees “Son of man” as the implied predicate from the context of John 8:28, offers this additional testimony:

That our interpretation of 8.28 as the Son of man being identical with the earthly Jesus and that the implied predicate of ἐγὼ εἰμι is the Son of man is correct is confirmed in 9.35-37. There, in accordance with his habit of repeating an idea of a previous passage in a varying form in a later one, the writer makes the point clear. Jesus’ words in reply to the question of the man born blind, whom he had healed, are reported thus: ὁ λαλῶν μετὰ σοῦ ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν (“he that is speaking with you is that one” [that is, “the Son of man”]). The Greek here is clearly a variant form for that in 4.26 and 8.28.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Compare Dan 7:13-14. See also W. Horbury, “The Messianic Associations of ‘The Son of Man,’” *JTS* 36 (1985), pages 34-55.

⁵⁹ Matt 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24 (twice), 45, 64; Mark 2:10, 28; 8:38; 9:12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 (twice), 41, 62; Lu 5:24; 6:5, 22; 7:34; 9:22, 26, 44, 58; 11:30; 12:8, 10, 40; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8, 31; 19:10; 21:27, 36; 22:22, 48, 69; 24:7; Joh 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53, 62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23, 34 (twice); 13:31.

⁶⁰ Edwin D. Freed, “The Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 86 (1967), pages 405-406.

Finally, in Mark 14:62 (discussed further, later in this chapter) Jesus responds to the high priest's question, "Are you the Christ the Son of the Blessed One?" using *ego eimi*. Jesus goes on to say that those questioning him "will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (underlining added). Clearly, then, Jesus identified himself as the "Son of man," the "Son of the Blessed One," by means of *ego eimi*.

In light of the above good reasons, I conclude that in John 8:28, as in 8:24, *ego eimi* is used to identify Jesus as the Messiah, "the Son of man." His relationship with the Father is made clear not by his use of *ego eimi*, but by the direct assertions Jesus makes about their relationship and about his identity as "the Christ the Son of the Blessed One." In John 8:24 *ego eimi* is best understood with the predicate "Christ" and in verse 28 with the predicate "Son of man." This is consistent with Jesus' discussion regarding sin and with his use of *ego eimi* in other accounts previously discussed where his identity as the Messiah was either directly (John 4:26) or indirectly (John 6:20) related to his use of *ego eimi*.

While it is true that Jesus' words in John 8:28 are not explicitly completed by the predicate "the Son of man," this is because this predicate is understood from the words Jesus had just spoken. As I have already shown with John 4:26, and perhaps even with John 6:20, this is how the expressions *'ani hu/ego eimi* are often completed. This usage can also been seen in the use of *ego eimi* by "the man who used to sit and beg" (John 9:8-9), and in other uses of *ego eimi* by Jesus that I will discuss later in this chapter. Therefore, while no explicit predicate is used here in John 9:9, one is clearly understood from the context in which *ego eimi* is used, a usage that comes just a few verses after Jesus' use of *ego eimi* in John 8:58.

It is, therefore, no surprise that we find several translations explicitly admitting the connection between Jesus' use of *ego eimi* and his identity as the Messiah in John 8:24, 28. For example, in John 8:24 the main text of *The Modern Language Bible* reads, "I am He," but the footnote states, "The Redeemer-

Messiah.” The main text of C.B. Williams’ *New Testament*, at both John 8:24 and 28, reads “I am the Christ” with “I am He” in the footnote. *The New Testament* by James Kleist and Joseph Lilly contains this footnote at John 8:24, “I am he: the one for whom the Jews were waiting; the [Messiah].”

Such an admission on the part of Jesus would naturally carry with it the thought of a relationship between himself and the one from whom he came. In this sense, Harner is correct in inferring an inherent sense of unity between Jesus and the Father, for such a thought is naturally conveyed through his self-identification as the promised Messiah from Jah (compare Psalm 2; Isaiah 11:1-3; Daniel 7:13-14). However, this unity is primarily revealed by the context in which *ego eimi* is used and by the predicate that is supplied to it. The unity between Jah and Jesus does not come from the use of *ego eimi* by itself. Commenting on John 8:24, but with reference also to verse 28, Meyer writes:

[ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι] namely, *the Messiah*, the great name which everyone understood without explanation, which concentrated in itself the highest hopes of all Israel on the basis of the old prophecies, and which was the *most present thought* both to Jesus and the Jews, especially in all their discussions—to Jesus in the form, “I am the Messiah” ... In opposition to the notion of there being another, Jesus uses the emphatic ἐγὼ. The non-mention of the name, which was taken for granted (it had been *mentioned* in iv. 25, 26), confers on it a quiet *majesty* that makes an irresistible impression on the minds of the hearers while Christ gives utterance to the brief words, ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι. As God comprehended the sum of the Old Testament faith in [*ʾani hu*], so Christ that of the New Testament in ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι.⁶¹

Meyer is correct in noting a similarity between the use of the Hebrew *ʾani hu* by God in the Old Testament and the use of *ego eimi* in the New Testament. But *how* is it similar? The evidence points to the conclusion that *ʾani hu/ego eimi* is used similarly by Jah, Jesus, and by others (such as the blind man in John 9) as a

⁶¹ Meyer, *The Gospel of John*, pages 270-271.

means of self-identification. The identification of God in the OT is made clear by the context, as is the identification of Jesus in the NT, and also the identification of the man born blind in John 9:9. Yet, all of these use *'ani hu/ego eimi* without an expressed predicate, though the predicate comes easily from the context.

John 13:19. Another instance of *ego eimi* used by Jesus without an explicit predicate is found in John 13:19-20. Here after speaking of the one who would betray him, Jesus says: "I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he [*ego eimi*]. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (RSV). When Jesus tells his disciples about what will happen when he is eventually betrayed, he clearly means for them to remember what it is he said so that when it does in fact occur they will know who he is ("you may believe that I am he [*ego eimi*]"). But who did they believe him to be?

John 13:19 is similar to John 8:28, in that Jesus there likewise told the Jews a future event would reveal his identity. As noted previously, the context of John 8:28 clearly shows Jesus was speaking about his identity as the "Christ" or "Son of man." But here in John 13:19 Harner believes that "there is no possibility of understanding a predicate from the context."⁶² I believe Harner is wrong. I believe for good reasons an implied predicate can be found in the context and understood with Jesus' use of *ego eimi* in John 13:19.

For example, in verse 18 Jesus quotes a *messianic* prophecy from Psalm 41:9 that reads, "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (NIV). Then in verse 19 Jesus tells his disciples once this scripture has been fulfilled they will know the Psalm is speaking about him, the Messiah! With this in mind, Jesus' disciples could

⁶² Harner, *The "I AM" of the Fourth Gospel*, page 37. Ball argues similarly ('*I Am*' in *John's Gospel*, page 198, note 1), as does Brown (*The Gospel According to John* (xiii-xxi) [AB 29; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966], page 555), though Brown does acknowledge that "some would supply an implicit predicate, 'the Messiah,' based on the rabbinical understanding of Ps xli."

easily have associated his statement in verse 20 (“he that receives me, receives him that sent me”) with an identification of who he claimed to be: the one who would be ‘betrayed’ according to the Psalm, namely, the Messiah or Christ who was “sent” by the Father.—Compare 1 John 4:14.

Ball again believes that because there are certain similarities in the language used by Jesus in John 13:19 and by Jah in Isaiah 43:10 (LXX) that “Jesus will be seen to be identified with the ‘Lord’ of the Old Testament.”⁶³ As I have shown already, the problem with this type of reasoning is it assumes that just because what Jah says and what Jesus says are similar (that is, in this case, because they both call for belief in them on the part of their hearers), then this somehow means they should be identified with each other. Fortunately, the context of the verses in question gives a clearer perspective on what is involved in the use of similar language by both Jah and by Jesus of Nazareth.

In the context of Isaiah 43:10 Jah brings to the Israelites’ attention facts that should remind them *he* is the true God, as opposed to the gods of the “national groups” (verse 9). But the context of John 13:19 in no way supports a similar identification for Jesus. In fact, the context of John 13:13 has nothing to do with any such identity (compare John 12:49-50; 13:3; 20). Also, in John 14:29 we see roughly the same language as that used by Jesus in John 13:19. Here Jesus again tells those around him about the things that would soon occur so when they do occur they should believe, because Jesus told them about such things *beforehand*.

Consider the following comparison of the Greek words used in John 13:19 and John 14:29, and then compare the English translations below the Greek texts:

John 13:19:

ἀπ’ ἄρτι | λέγω ὑμῖν πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι, | ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅταν γένηται
ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι.

John 14:29:

καὶ νῦν | εἶρηκα ὑμῖν πρὶν γενέσθαι, | ἵνα ὅταν γένηται πιστεύσητε.

⁶³ Ball, ‘*I Am*’ in *John’s Gospel*, pages 199-200.

John 13:19 (RSV):

I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

John 14:29 (RSV):

And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.

John 14:29 is spoken by Jesus in a context where he asserts that he is going to one who is greater than him (John 14:28). Jah God never speaks like this in Isaiah, or anywhere else in the OT. But this (John 14:28) is where Trinitarians assume that Jesus speaks from his *human* nature, not from his divine nature. Yet, the text itself makes no such distinction, and neither does any other NT text that speaks about Jesus' nature. Indeed, what the NT does teach about Jesus' nature before (John 1:1 ["a god"]), during (John 1:14 ["flesh"]), and after (1 Corinthians 15:45 ["spirit"]) his life on earth contradicts the Trinitarian belief about Jesus' dual nature (see my discussion of Philippians 2:5-9 on pages 214-220; see also Chapter 6).

Contrary to Ball's claims, there is nothing in the context of John 13:19 supporting a connection between it and Isaiah 43:10, at least not in terms of identifying Jah and Jesus by means of *ego eimi*. Harner writes concerning the context of John 13:19:

In 13:20 Jesus says to his disciples, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me.' The disciples, that is, will realize that to receive Jesus is to receive the Father who sent him, and with this realization they will grasp the meaning of Jesus' statement, *ego eimi*.⁶⁴

Harner appears to be correct when he sees verse 20 as a key to understanding the meaning of *ego eimi* in verse 19, but in what sense? The disciples would certainly have associated Jesus' statement in verse 19 with an identification of *who he claimed to be*. This identification would then have indicated a union between these two with the Son as the one "sent by" the Father, as the

⁶⁴ Harner, *The 'I Am' of the Fourth Gospel*, pages 38-39.

“anointed one” of Psalm 2 who would be betrayed according to the messianic prophecy of Psalm 41:9. This is the very text Jesus quotes in John 13:18! So those listening to him would easily have understood that he was in fact this Messiah, the sent-forth one of God. But Jesus gave an additional means of knowing this is who he is by doing what his Father had done to the Israelites before him: Jesus told them in advance what would occur in connection with him so that when it did occur they would know.

Therefore, there are good reasons for again associating Jesus’ use of *ego eimi* with his identity as “the promised Messiah.”⁶⁵ Jesus uses the messianic prophecy concerning his eventual betrayal to build his disciples’ faith in the things they had come to believe in connection with him (Matthew 16:16) at a time when their confidence might otherwise have been shaken by his arrest and execution. Instead, the fulfillment of the prophecy would serve as a “seal of the Messiahship.”⁶⁶

John 18:5-6, 8. The final three occurrences of *ego eimi* in John’s Gospel are found in John 18:5-8, the scene of Jesus’ arrest. After Jesus is confronted by Judas, by Roman soldiers, and by representatives from the chief priests and the Pharisees (verse 3), according to verse 4 Jesus asks, “Whom are you looking for?” Those before him reply, “Jesus the Nazarene.” Jesus then responds with the words *ego eimi* (verse 5). Verse 6 tells us that after Jesus answered them “they drew back and fell to the ground.” Then in verse 7 Jesus again asks, “Whom are you looking for?” The crowd again replies, “Jesus the Nazarene.” Jesus answers them in verse 8, according to the RSV, “I told you that I am he [*ego eimi*]; so, if you seek me, let these men go.”

It seems rather clear that this is but another example of simple self-identification, as we saw in John 6:20. But in this case a predicate is even more clearly implied by the context, for Jesus’

⁶⁵ John Calvin, *John*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries, ed. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), page 326. See also Meyer, *The Gospel of John*, page 395; J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), page 311.

⁶⁶ Augustus Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1859), page 824.

self-identification is in direct response to their request for “Jesus the Nazarene.” In effect, Jesus responds to them with “I am he” or “I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom you are seeking.” Indeed, the name “Jesus” in Greek (Ἰησοῦς, *Iesous*) is actually supplied after *eimi* in the original Codex Vaticanus (B^{*}) of the fourth century and also in the amended text of this Codex (B^c). The reading which places “Jesus” before *ego eimi* (Ἰησοῦς ἐγὼ εἰμι (*Iesous ego eimi*) is found in Codex Sinaiticus (ℵ), also of the fourth century CE, and several other witnesses (A C G N Θ Ψ) contain a similar reading with the Greek article preceding “Jesus” (ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐγὼ εἰμι [*ho Iesous ego eimi*]).⁶⁷ But what are we to make of the mob’s reaction to Jesus’ reply? Why did they ‘draw back and fall to the ground’?

Though Harner agrees that “Jesus of Nazareth” is the obvious predicate for *ego eimi*, he nonetheless believes that the phrase also “clearly implies more than the everyday meaning of self-identification.”⁶⁸ That may be true, in that there is something special about the identity of “Jesus of Nazareth.” But Brown goes too far when he writes, “John intends ‘I AM’ as a divine name.”⁶⁹ What, though, about the crowd’s reaction? Again, why does the revelation of “Jesus of Nazareth” cause them to ‘draw back and fall to the ground’? I believe Tholuck is right in pointing to the “overwhelming impression produced by Christ” in John 7:46.⁷⁰ There in response to Jesus’ words recorded in verses 37-38, the crowds react, “This is for a certainty The Prophet.” Others were saying, “This is the Christ” (verses 40-41). According to verse 31 the crowd starts to realize that Jesus might be the Christ, and then in verse 32 the Pharisees ‘dispatch officers to get hold of him.’ But according to verse 45 they were unsuccessful. Why?

⁶⁷ However, it is uncertain whether in these last two variants “Jesus” should be taken as the subject of λέγει αὐτοῖς (“Jesus said to them”) or as the predicate of ἐγὼ εἰμι (“I am Jesus”). See, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, John, Reuben Swanson, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 1995), page 239, for a complete list of the variant readings.

⁶⁸ Harner, *The “I AM” of the Fourth Gospel*, page 45.

⁶⁹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (xiii-xxi), page 818.

⁷⁰ Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, page 380.

In verse 46 the officers reply to the Pharisees (according to the NIV), “No one ever spoke the way this man does.” With this in mind, the reaction of the crowd in 18:6 is no surprise at all given the confident, unexpectedly immediate self-identification Jesus makes in the face of such opposition. Also, the soldiers present likely remembered hearing about how impressive Jesus was in his earlier encounter with the officers who were sent to “get hold of him,” but who failed because of the way Jesus spoke.

The context in that account shows that it was Jesus’ words and the way he spoke that caused the crowds to conclude, “This is the Christ” (John 7:41). The words “they drew back and fell to the ground” may mean no more than that “the men who came to make the arrest (some of whom at least did not previously know Jesus even by sight) were so overcome by His moral ascendancy that they recoiled in fear.”⁷¹

So there are good reasons for understanding Jesus’ revelation of himself to the arresting crowd as the one they had come to arrest in the first place, “Jesus the Nazarene.” They simply did not expect or were not prepared for his fearless self-identification in the face of such opposition.⁷² Indeed, it was only after Jesus told them to let his disciples go (verses 8-9), and after he prevented any defense his followers had attempted to raise on his behalf (verses 10-11), that the “soldier band and the military commander and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him” (verse 12). As James Bishop of East Bengal observed:

⁷¹ Bernard and McNeile, *Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2, pages 586-587.

⁷² James White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 211, note 26, objects to Bernard and McNeile where they write that those who came to arrest Jesus “were so overcome by His moral ascendancy that they recoiled in fear,” and to my statement (from the first edition of this book, page 144 [page 286 of the second edition]) that those coming to arrest Jesus “were taken aback by his fearless demeanor.” But this was hardly the extent of my argument as can be seen from my discussion here, which is very similar to my discussion of this account in my first and second editions of this book. My citation of Bernard and McNeile is merely part of my argument. Indeed, White does not even present a counter exegesis to John 7; he does not explain the variants in ancient manuscripts of John 18:5-6 which actually supply the understood predicate “Jesus”; and White does not address the impressions left on the soldiers who had come to arrest Jesus earlier in John’s Gospel, impressions that were so great that even Roman soldiers (non-believers) could not arrest Jesus simply because of the way he spoke to them.

There is no need to suppose that there was any particular divine implications in his words to account for the fear of the soldiery. For such men in such an age it was quite natural. But to suppose that our Lord said "I am He (the Great One)" and then repeated "I told you I am He," purposely instilling terror into his enemies, neither suits the context, nor suits his own divine humility.⁷³

A summary of the "I am" sayings in John. In summary, there are good reasons for supplying predicates associated with Jesus' identity as the Messiah, or "Son of man," from the contexts of John 4:26; 8:24, 28, and 13:19 to his use of *ego eimi* in these texts. In John 6:20 and in John 18:5-6, 8, the meaning is that of simple self-identification, "It is I," or "I am Jesus." In John 6:20 Jesus assures his disciples that he is not an apparition whom they should fear, and in 18:5-6, 8 Jesus identifies himself as the one whom the mob is looking for, "Jesus of Nazareth."

The use of *ego eimi* in John's Gospel for self-identification, or where a predicate is to be supplied from the context, is not restricted to Jesus (see John 9:9). This shows there was no concern over using *ego eimi* without an expressed predicate for persons other than Jah or Jesus. In all of the above referenced texts the unexpressed predicate can easily be found in the immediate or larger contexts in which *ego eimi* is used. As I will now show, this is true not only in John's Gospel but also in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

***Ego Eimi* in Matthew, Mark, and Luke**

"Are you the Christ?" As in John's Gospel, the words *ego eimi* occur without an expressed predicate in each of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Two of these recorded uses have already been considered to some extent, but I will review them again at the beginning of this section. The first use is in Mark 14:62 (Luke 22:70). Here Jesus is on trial before

⁷³ James, Bishop of East Bengal, "'I Am' in the Gospels," *Theology* 62.468 (1959), page 238.

the high priest, who asks him, “Are you the Christ the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus responds: “I am [*ego eimi*]; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (RSV). Clearly Jesus’ words answer the high priest’s question in the affirmative, “I am the Christ.”⁷⁴ But Jesus goes even further by directly alluding to the messianic prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14 concerning the “Son of man.”

When I discuss John 8:58 later in this chapter, I will further explain how the reaction by the high priest and by other members of the Sanhedrin here shows that they considered it blasphemous for Jesus to call himself the Messiah, or Son of God (Luke 22:70-71). Brown, however, believes that the charge of blasphemy would be more understandable if “Jesus were claiming a divine name rather than simply affirming his messiahship.”⁷⁵ If that is the case, and if Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah was not the most serious charge the Jews had against him, then why did the high priest not ask him if he claimed to be God?

The question put to Jesus in Mark 14:62 (Luke 22:70) was specific to whether Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, “*the Son of the Blessed One*” (Mark 14:61). It is this question Jesus answers, and it is his affirmative response to it that brings forth the charge of blasphemy.⁷⁶ Here again *ego eimi* is used to identify Jesus as

⁷⁴ M. de Jonge, “The Use of the Word ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ in the Johannine Epistles,” in *Studies in John* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), page 67, parallels 1Jo 5:1 (which refers to “the one believing that Jesus is the Christ”) to 1Jo 5:5 which speaks of “the one believing that Jesus is the Son of God.” De Jonge concludes that this use of “Christ” and “Son of God” shows that the two expressions are here “interchangeable.” The same appears to be true for “Christ” and “Son of the Blessed One” in Mr 14:61.

⁷⁵ Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (i-xii), Appendix IV, page 538.

⁷⁶ There is a significant parallel to Jesus’ use of *ego eimi* in these accounts to the *Apocalypse* (17.2) section of the *Life of Adam and Eve*:

Καὶ λέγει μοι· Σὺ εἶ ἡ Εὐα;
Καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ· Ἐγὼ εἰμι

And he said to me, “Are you Eve?”
And I said to him, “I am.”

Καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς
... ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· Ἐγὼ εἰμι

And he said to him, “Are you the
Christ?” Jesus said, “I am.”

In both cases the predicate is supplied from the context and it is clearly in answer to the question. For the Greek text of *Apocalypse* 17.2, see Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, 2d ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press: 1999), page 52; Albert-Marie Denis, *Concordance Grecque Des*

the Christ, showing also that his claim to be the Messiah was enough reason for his enemies to charge him with blasphemy.

Simple self-identification. Another text in which *ego eimi* occurs without an expressed predicate, and that I also considered earlier in this chapter relative to John 6:20, is Matthew 14:27 (Mark 6:50). Here Jesus crosses the sea to his disciples who cry out upon catching sight of him, fearing that he is an apparition. But Jesus assures them that it is he, not some spirit. Therefore, once again *ego eimi* appears clearly to be used in response to the disciples' concern and confusion about whom/what they saw. Jesus' response makes clear who he is and his clarity prompts those in the boat to acknowledge him as "God's Son," not as "God" or a "person" of a triune God.—Matthew 14:33.

In Luke 24:36 some manuscripts⁷⁷ have *ego eimi* used in a sense similar to the use of *ego eimi* in Matthew 14:27 (Mark 6:50) and John 6:20. Jesus' sudden appearance to his disciples as they are discussing his appearance to Peter and Cleopas frightens them, causing them also to think Jesus is a spirit or a demon impostor.⁷⁸ But Jesus assures them it is he, and not a "spirit" whom they should fear. Jesus then shows them wound marks resembling those he received when he was executed at Golgotha, revealing clearly his identity as Jesus of Nazareth.⁷⁹

Pseudépigraphes D'Ancien Testament (Peeters, Leuven: Institut Orientaliste, 1987), page 815. For English translations of this text see Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., Second Revised Edition (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1999), page 52E; M.D. Johnson, "Life of Adam and Eve," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, J.H. Charlesworth, ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), page 279; L. Wells, *The Books of Adam and Eve*, in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), page 146.

⁷⁷ See *New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, Luke, Reuben Swanson, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 1995), page 416, for a listing of the variants to Lu 24:36. The uncials G and P read ἐγώ εἰμι μὴ φοβεῖσθε, while one late cursive (579) transposes the words, μὴ φοβεῖσθε ἐγώ εἰμι. Both readings mean, "It is I; do not be afraid." In Lu 24:39 *ego eimi* is followed by the pronoun "he" (Greek: *autos*), "I am he [= Jesus]."

⁷⁸ References to "a spirit" involve a demonic spirit in Luke's Gospel (see Lu 4:33; 8:29; 9:39, 42). The fact that the disciples were frightened and terrified of Jesus' appearance also shows that they may have thought they were beholding a demonic spirit. See Chapter 6 for a further discussion of Jesus' post-resurrection body and appearances.

⁷⁹ Jesus was likely here in a body different in other ways from his pre-execution body (compare Joh 20:11-18), otherwise there would have been no need to produce

“For false Christs and false prophets will arise.” The final use of *ego eimi* in the Synoptics⁸⁰ is in Mark 13:6 (Luke 21:8). Here Jesus says in response to his disciples’ question about “the sign when all these things are destined to come to a conclusion”: “Take heed that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he [*ego eimi*]!’ and they will lead many astray” (RSV). Both Mark and Luke here use *ego eimi* without an expressed predicate. But in Matthew’s record (24:5) of this same account we find the predicate ὁ χριστός (*ho christos*, “the Christ”) expressed in direct association with and right after *ego eimi*!⁸¹ Mark and Luke evidently believed *ego eimi* would be understood by readers of this account in association with a claim by others to be the Messiah.⁸² Matthew simply makes this explicit by adding the predicate *ho christos*.⁸³

Surprisingly, after referring to the Matthean passage which has “the Christ” as the expressed predicate, Brown says that “the context does not clearly suggest the predicate”!⁸⁴ Was Matthew

any other physical evidence as to his identity. Those present would have simply recognized him by his facial features or perhaps even by the sound of his voice. Therefore, his manifestation here is similar to that of the angels in Gen 19:1-3, where the angels took human form so they could be seen by Lot, even to the point of eating a meal with him as Jesus also did with his disciples after his resurrection.—Joh 21:9-15.

⁸⁰ Two other occurrences of *ego eimi* are used in the form of a question, where the disciples and Judas expect a negative answer.—Matt 26:22, 25.

⁸¹ The Peshitta of Luke’s account also has an expressed predicate, *ʿena ʾna meshikha* (“I am Messiah”). Cursive 157 (12th cent.) likewise reads with Matthew, *ʿEγὼ εἰμι ὁ Χριστὸς* (“I am the Christ”). In uncials W Θ and in minuscules 13, 28, 69, 124, 565, 579, 700, 788, 1071 and 1346, Mark 13:6 reads the same as Matthew. In recording Paul’s synagogue speech Luke transposes the predicateless *ego eimi* and places it in the mouth of John the Baptist: “What do you suppose I am? I am not he [*ouk eimi ego*]” (Ac 13:25). Here again the implied predicate is “Christ” or “Messiah,” the “savior” of whom Paul speaks (verses 22-23).

⁸² This shows that among the first-century Christians there was a tradition which understood *ego eimi* as having both positive and negative messianic connotations. John’s use of this phrase in reference to Jesus may have come about as a result of the Synoptic usage. But it seems that the LXX influenced him as far as using *ego eimi* with an understood predicate (see note 34; compare the use of *ego eimi* in Joh 9:9).

⁸³ In addition to the Greek of Matthew, the Shem-Tob Hebrew Matthew reads *ʾani hu hammashiakh* (“I [am] he, the Messiah”) and the du Tillet text reads simply *ʾni mashiakh* (“I [am] Messiah”). The Peshitta and the Curetonian read the same, *ʿena ʾna meshikha* (“I am Messiah”).

⁸⁴ Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (i-xii), Appendix IV, page 538.

wrong, then? That is the position taken by Manson.⁸⁵ Yet, the predicate (“the Christ”) is not at all out of place in a context where Jesus speaks of those who would mislead many as part of a sign of the “conclusion of the age” (*synteleias tou aionos* [Matthew 24:3]). Additionally, Mark’s account goes on to speak of those who would say, “Here is the Christ.” Mark then adds, “For false Christs and false prophets will arise” (Mark 13:21-22). Clearly, then, we have yet another instance where *ego eimi* is used in connection with the identity of the Messiah, though in this instance it is a case where others would claim the title that rightly belongs only to Jesus of Nazareth.

A summary of the “I am” sayings in the Synoptics. In summarizing the use of *ego eimi* in the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew 14:27 (Mark 6:50) and Luke 24:36 (see note 76 above) use *ego eimi* to convey simple self-identification, “It is I.” In Mark 14:62 (Luke 22:70) and in Mark 13:6 (Luke 21:8), the implied predicate for *ego eimi* is “Christ” or “Son of the Blessed One.” This understanding of Mark 13:6 and Luke 21:8 is made explicit by Matthew 24:5.

Later in this chapter I will discuss the one NT passage that I have only mentioned in passing to this point, namely, John 8:58. This is a text in which Jesus uses *ego eimi* in a way that might seem similar to some of the other uses considered above. But it is also a usage that includes elements not shared by any of the other *ego eimi* texts in the NT.

While Jehovah’s Witnesses believe in John 8:58 Jesus was asserting his existence before Abraham’s birth, Trinitarians cite John 8:58 in support of their belief that Jesus is eternal, or that he identified himself as God by means of *ego eimi* (“I am”). After considering a brief, early history of the interpretation of John 8:58, I will then explain how the grammar and the context of John 8:58 support the Witnesses’ interpretation this text.

⁸⁵ W. Manson, “The ΕΓΩ ΕΙΜΙ of the Messianic Presence in the New Testament,” *JTS* 48 (1947), pages 137-145. On page 139 Manson writes: “Does Ἐγώ εἰμι in the Markan passage really mean, as the author of Matthew took it to mean, Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ Χριστός [‘I am the Christ’]? I cannot think so.”

A Brief History on the Early Interpretation of John 8:58

Before considering the text and grammar of John 8:58 in its context, I will present a brief history of the interpretation of John 8:58 beginning with Ignatius of Antioch (early second century CE) and ending with Augustine of Hippo (early to middle fifth century CE). This brief history of the interpretation of John 8:58 will prove instructive not only by providing us with insight into how early Christian writers understood John 8:58, but it will also show us where the understanding of this text appears to have changed.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 115 CE). The epistles of Ignatius (originally composed during the late first to early second century CE), bishop of Antioch, are some of the more difficult writings to evaluate in terms of their authenticity. Those who study Ignatius and the manuscript tradition of his writings usually consider the middle recension (often mistakenly labeled the “shorter” version) to be the most authentic. Some have voiced support for what is known as the longer recension, while still others prefer the shorter version preserved in Syriac.⁸⁶ Some have even gone so far as to say that *all* of the versions of Ignatius that have come down to us have considerable interpolations, and so it is impossible to know for sure which tradition contains the authentic, or even the most accurate, Ignatian writings.⁸⁷

It is only in the longer version of Ignatius’ epistle to the Magnesians (9.1) that reference is made to John 8:58. Though the reading omits γενέσθαι (*genesthai*, “came to be” [in reference to Abraham]) from the NT passage, Magnesians 9:1 quotes John 8:58 in a context where OT expectations concerning the coming of the Christ are clearly in view. First, Ignatius quotes John 5:46

⁸⁶ The popular edition of the apostolic fathers in volume one of the ANF series published by Eerdmans contains a translation of the middle and longer recensions of Ignatius’ writings.

⁸⁷ A concise but helpful survey of various commentators’ opinions on the Ignatian writings can be found in J. Ruis-Campus, *The Four Authentic Letters of Ignatius, The Martyr* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 213; Rome, 1980), pages 23-24.

where Moses is said to have written about the Christ, and then Ignatius quotes John 8:56, 58. In the latter text Abraham is said to have 'rejoiced at seeing the day' of the Christ. Therefore, it appears that the only idea associated with John 8:58 in the longer version of Ignatius's epistle to the Magnesians is that Jesus was the Christ whose "day" Abraham "saw."

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130 to c. 200 CE). Irenaeus quotes John 8:58 in his *Against Heresies* 4.13.4, and it is also alluded to in his *Fragments* 52. In *Fragments* 52 Irenaeus writes, "He was from Abraham, so did he [Jesus] also exist before Abraham." In *Against Heresies* 4.13.4 Irenaeus writes about Jesus' extension of friendship to his disciples according to John 15:15. Irenaeus points out that in this Jesus identified himself as the Word of God, whom Irenaeus believes fellowshipped with Abraham even as Abraham was Jah's "friend."⁸⁸—James 2:23.

When making this point, Irenaeus also writes that the Word of God "was perfect from the beginning ('Abraham was' [but Jesus] says, 'I am')." Here Irenaeus connects Jesus' statement about existing before Abraham to "the beginning," which appears to be presumably the beginning of Genesis 1:1/John 1:1 (compare *Against Heresies* 4.14.1), a "beginning" I will discuss further in Chapter 4.

Origen (c.185 to c.253 CE). When writing against a Platonist philosopher named Celsus who flourished during the late second century CE, Origen argued that it was appropriate to worship both God and his servant Jesus Christ, whom Celsus speaks of as having only "lately appeared among men" (*Against Celsus* 8.12). Origen responds to Celsus by pointing out that the Father is in the Son, even as the Son is in the Father. Origen also teaches that the Son of God existed before his earthly appearance, and he quotes John 8:58 as proof of Jesus' preexistence. But

⁸⁸ Irenaeus believed that part of the Son's revealed role was to bring about these kinds of relationships between God and man, "In the first place we must believe not only in the Father, but also in His Son now revealed; for He it is who leads man into fellowship and unity with God" (*Against Heresies* 4.13.1).

Origen only cites John 8:58 to prove the preexistence of the Son before he came to earth.⁸⁹

Novatian (died 258 CE). Novatian wrote *A Treatise Concerning the Trinity* in which he also cites John 8:58. In the context of his citation of this text, Novatian is attempting to prove from Scripture that Jesus did not come merely as man, but “as God.” His argument rests in large part on the fact that a man “could not come from heaven [so] ... He who descended thence must be God.” Non-Trinitarians, of course, could rightly point out that prior to coming to the earth Jesus was a divine son of God

⁸⁹ Regarding his comments about the worship of God and of his Son, Origen goes on to explain:

Accordingly, we worship with all our power the one God, and His only Son, the Word and the Image of God, by prayers and supplications; and we offer our petitions to the God of the universe through His only-begotten Son. To the Son we first present them, and beseech Him, as ‘the propitiation for our sins,’ and our High Priest, to offer our desires, and sacrifices, and prayers, to the Most High. Our faith, therefore, is directed to God through His Son, who strengthens it in us [*Against Celsus* 8.13].

In *Against Celsus* 8.12 the Eerdmans edition does have Origen writing to Celsus with the words, “We worship one God, the Father and the Son, therefore, as we have explained” (Greek: ἕνα οὖν θεὸν ὡς ἀποδεδώχαμεν τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱὸν θεραπεύομεν). But what Origen seems to be saying in the context of his response to Celsus is that had Celsus rightly understood what Jesus meant by what he said about he and the Father being “one” (Joh 10:30), and that the Father is in the Son and that the Son is in the Father, then Celsus would know that they do not “worship” or “serve” (either meaning is acceptable for θεραπεύω) God and his servant as equals. Rather, as Origen explains (with underlining added):

We worship [θρησχεύομεν], therefore, the Father of truth, and the Son, who is the truth; and these, while they are two, considered as persons or subsistences, are one in unity of thought, in harmony and in identity of will. So entirely are they one, that he who has seen the Son, ‘who is the brightness of God’s glory, and the express image of His person’ [Heb 1:3], has seen in Him who is the image of God, God himself.

It should be noted that the first use of “person” in the above quote from the Eerdmans edition is not in the Greek text. The text merely says that the Father and the Son are “two in substance [or ‘nature’]” (Greek: ὄντα δύο τῇ ὑποστάσει). With respect to the second use of “person” in reference to Heb 1:3 (compare the KJV) this, too, is incorrect. The same term ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) is used in Heb 1:3, but it means “the essential nature of basic structure/nature of an entity” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., page 1040). Harold Attridge is right in noting that *hypostasis* in Heb 1:3 does not have “the technical sense of discrete entity or ‘person’ of the Godhead that it eventually comes to have in fourth-century Trinitarian theology” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989], page 44).

who existed in the presence of God (John 1:1), and that such a being could come from heaven for he was not a man when he was "with God." Novatian's point here simply does not follow from the evidence he cites.

However, Novatian's citation of John 8:58 is really for the purpose of proving that Jesus was not "only man" in view of his preexistence: "If Christ was only man, how did He say, 'Before Abraham was, I Am?' for no man can be before Him from whom he himself is" (chapter 15 [underlining added]).⁹⁰ In this Novatian is correct: Jesus existed before Abraham and so he was not "only man" prior to 'coming from heaven.' But Novatian goes too far with Jesus' preexistence, that is, beyond what the evidence he cites will support.

Gregory Thaumaturgus (c. 213 to c. 260). Gregory Thaumaturgus, a Christian bishop and student of Origen, wrote a treatise called *Twelve Topics on the Faith*. In responding to the argument that the "Son of God who is before the ages is one, and He who has appeared in these last times is another," Gregory (Topic 5, Explication) writes: "How could it be said that the Son of God who is before the ages, and He who has appeared in these last times, are different, when the Lord Himself says, 'Before Abraham was, I am;' and I came forth from God, and I come, and again, I go to my Father?" Gregory here uses John 8:58 to prove that the Christ who spoke to the Jews in John 8 had a prehuman existence as the Son of God, and so the two are not "different."

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373 CE). Athanasius was the most outstanding fourth-century CE defender of Nicene theology. In *Defense of His Flight* (written in response to the charge that Athanasius was a coward for fleeing from his enemies), Athanasius quotes John 8:58. But his citation is only for the purpose of showing that, at times, even Jesus took flight from his enemies. In Discourse 1 (4.13) of his *Four Discourses*

⁹⁰ The use of a capital "A" in the "I Am" of the Eerdmans' translation of Novatian's work is by choice of the translator. There is nothing in the context of Novatian's citation of Joh 8:58 that indicates he viewed "I Am" as a divine name for the Christ. Rather, Novatian uses Joh 8:58 to prove Jesus' preexistence.

Against the Arians, Athanasius again quotes John 8:58. In this context Athanasius is trying to prove that the Son is eternal, that there was not a time ‘when he was not.’⁹¹ Prior to his citation of John 8:58 here, Athanasius wrote:

And whereas the Lord Himself says, ‘I am the Truth,’ not ‘I became the Truth;’ but always, ‘I am,—I am the Shepherd,—I am the Light,’— ... who hearing such language from God, and the Wisdom, and Word of the Father, speaking of Himself, will any longer hesitate about the truth, and not forthwith believe that in the phrase ‘I am,’ is signified that the Son is eternal and without beginning [1.4.12].

After reading the above, it might seem appropriate to understand Athanasius’ citation of John 8:58 in 1.4.13 as a further attempt by him to prove (in line with his theory about the phrase ‘I am’) the Son’s eternity. But this is not the case. Though Athanasius does see “in the phrase ‘I am’ ... that the Son is eternal and without beginning” (even where “I am” is used in expressions such as “*I am* the truth” or “*I am* the Shepherd”!), he quotes John 8:58 along with several other texts to show that “the phrases ‘once was not,’ and ‘before it came to be,’ and ‘when,’ and the like, belong to things originate and creatures” (1.4.13) of whom Abraham is but an example. John 8:58 is not specifically cited by Athanasius to show Jesus is eternal, but one might connect his citation of this text with Athanasius’ overall view of the use of “I am.”

In his lengthy discussion of Proverbs 8:22 and its context, Athanasius ultimately explains away the references there to the creation of Wisdom whom Athanasius himself identifies with the

⁹¹ In responding to the Arian claim that there was a “time” when the Son did not exist (‘There was once when he was not’—which is the natural consequence of the terms used by the Arians according to Athanasius), Athanasius writes: “For no holy Scripture has used such language of the Savior, but rather [ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον] ‘always’ [τὸ ἀεὶ] and ‘eternal’ [τὸ αἰόσιον] and ‘coexistent always with the Father’ [τὸ συνεῖναι ἀεὶ τῷ Πατρὶ].” In fact, no “holy scripture” uses these terms in describing the nature of the Son! There is also no articulation in “holy scripture” of the Trinitarian concepts of “personal” distinctions *within* one triune being (God). What is taught in the Bible contradicts Trinitarianism, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this book.

prehuman Jesus (see Chapter 5 for more about the identity of "Wisdom" in Proverbs 8). Athanasius does this by claiming that the verbs 'create,' 'form,' and 'set,' in reference to the 'beginning' of Wisdom at the hands of Jah, should not be understood in reference to the *being* of Wisdom "but [to] his taking manhood" (2.20.53). It is in the course of his explanation here that Athanasius quotes John 8:58 to show that Wisdom "preexisted before this" flesh-taking event (John 1:14), for Jesus existed "before Abraham."

In his third discourse against the Arians, Athanasius tries to show the irony in what he perceives as similarities between the Jews' and the Arians' denial of "the Eternity and Godhead of the Word." Athanasius tries to remove their objections concerning the humanity and the divinity of Jesus, which the Arians apparently believed to be incompatible with each other. In communicating the Arian position, Athanasius has them arguing as follows, "'How dare ye say that He is the Word proper to the Father's Essence, who had a body, as to endure all this?'" Athanasius presents the Jews' argument (3.26.27) in this way: "'Is this not the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? [H]ow then is it that He saith, Before Abraham was, I am, and I came down from heaven?'" Clearly, then, Athanasius preserves the Jews' objection to Jesus' claim of *preexistence*, as found in John 6:41-42 and in 8:58.

In his fourth discourse Athanasius responds to the argument that if the *man* Jesus (not the Logos) is the Son of God, then the *man* must be the one through whom God created (John 1:3). It must also then be the case that the *man* Jesus "was in being before Abraham came to be" (4.20). Athanasius continues making light of the Jews' arguments, writing: "And is it not absurd to say, as they do, that one who came of the seed of Abraham after two and forty generations [that is, the man Jesus], should exist before Abraham came to be?" It is clear the main point related to Athanasius' citations of John 8:58 is Jesus' *preexistence*.⁹²

⁹² In a synodal *Letter to the Church of Antioch*, Joh 8:58 is also alluded to in section 7, where we read, "neither was there one Son of God before Abraham, another after Abraham."

Though Athanasius believes in the eternality of the Son, and though he does connect “I am” (as used in numerous expressions) with the Son’s eternality, Athanasius does not directly appear to use John 8:58 as a proof text for this teaching. Athanasius uses John 8:58 as a proof for Jesus’ preexistence which (like Novatian) Athanasius understands in an extended sense to involve the Son’s eternality as well as his identity as “God” in a Trinitarian sense. Athanasius does not, however, use John 8:58 to try and prove that Jesus uses “I am” as a divine name for God. But he does write about how some early Christian writers understood *ego eimi* as a divine title or name for God the Father.

For example, in his third discourse against the Arians (3.23.6) Athanasius argues that when the Bible calls God the Father the “only God,” the “one God,” “I am” (*ego eimi*), and by other titles, this is not meant as “a denial of the Son.” Here Athanasius shows that he does understand *ego eimi* as a title for God, though the LXX of Exodus 3:14 does not use it in this way (see Chapter 1, pages 115-123). Further, while *ego eimi* in Exodus 3:14 has an expressed predicate (*ho on* [“the Being” or “the Existing One”]), the LXX of Isaiah and other OT books often use *ego eimi* in association with a predicate that is understood from the context (see note 34).

In spite of this frequent use of *ego eimi* with an unexpressed but understood predicate in both the OT and the NT, Athanasius and others developed the view that *ego eimi* itself is used as a title for God and that it also ‘signifies that the Son is eternal and without beginning.’ From this time forward, other writers similarly used the expression *ego eimi* to express their Trinitarian theology.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315 to 368 CE). Cyril prepared a series of twenty-four Lectures in Jerusalem during the middle of the fourth century CE. These Lectures discuss what Cyril viewed as fundamental Christian beliefs. Though consecrated by Arian bishop Acacius of Caesarea, and though some did doubt Cyril’s “orthodoxy” for a time, he is clearly opposed to Arian thinking in his writings and Cyril appears quite “orthodox” when it comes to the divinity of Jesus in his Lectures.

In this Lectures (11.20) Cyril teaches the Son of God 'began his being' "before all ages." By this, Cyril means that the Son was "eternally begotten of the Father." In support of this view, Cyril quotes the Greek OT text of Micah 5:2 which speaks of the Messiah's origin "from the beginning, out of days of undetermined length." This is a possible translation of the LXX text, which some Trinitarians take to mean "from the beginning, from the days of eternity" (Greek: ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος, *ap' arches ex hemeron aionos*).⁹³

While there may be some difference of opinion concerning the translation of *aion* in this and in other texts,⁹⁴ the translation of "from the beginning" is rather clear. A more important question, then, is does "beginning" here refer to some definite *beginning* of or "in" time or to what some consider a 'timeless' period, which I have no good reasons to believe even exists.⁹⁵ It

⁹³ A passage very similar to Mic 5:2 is Prov 8:22-23, where both *aion* and "beginning" (*arche*) are used in a context that clearly speaks about the creation of "Wisdom" (see Chapter 5). In the NT "wisdom" is identified as a person who speaks the same words as Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Micah 5:2. For example, in Matt 23:34 Jesus says, "I am sending forth to you prophets and wise men and public instructors. Some of them you will kill ..." In Lu 11:49 Jesus says (with underlining added), "the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send forth to them prophets and apostles, and they will kill and persecute some of them.'" In Tatian's Diatessaron (an early Gospel harmony, and one of the oldest witnesses to the NT) Jesus is presented as saying (41.1), "I, the wisdom of God, send unto you prophets, and apostles ..." This is J. Hamlyn Hill's translation of the Arabic version, from *The Life of Christ: The Diatessaron of Tatian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1894), on page 205. Those unfamiliar with Hill's work can compare Hogg's translation in the Eerdmans' ANF series, vol. 10, on page 106.

⁹⁴ Meanings for *aion* range from "a long period of time, without ref. to beginning or end," to "a segment of time as a particular unit of history, *age*," to "the world as a spatial concept" (see *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., pages 32-33). Compare Augustine's comments on Ps 93:2 (NPNF, vol. 8, page 458), where he writes concerning the use of *aion* in the expression *ap'* ["from"] *aion*, that it is "sometimes used for an age, sometimes for everlasting."

⁹⁵ This question is really about whether "beginning" here refers to some point *in* a measurable series of events or to a period *of* such events, that occurs or that takes place in relation to other periods or other events. In the Bible, "beginning" is never explicitly or implicitly understood or defined as a 'timeless' period. The very notion of 'beginning,' apart from some articulated qualification that would suggest otherwise, appears (based on its usage) to involve some thing or some act that is discernable and measurable in some sense in terms of its existence or occurrence in relation to other things or events that occur. Regardless of what people may otherwise think about

is enough for me to say here that, for Cyril, Micah 5:2 supports the belief that the Messiah is eternal. The Father is “the beginning of the Son,” but this beginning is not a ‘beginning *in time*.’ Cyril views this as an ‘eternal beginning,’ which to me is nothing more than a theologically motivated oxymoron.

Cyril then cites four additional NT texts in support of his teaching about the eternality of the Son of God. These four texts are John 8:56 (“your father Abraham rejoiced greatly in the prospect of seeing my day, and he saw it and rejoiced”), John 8:58 (our subject text), John 17:5 (“the glory that I had alongside you before the world was”), and John 17:24 (“Father ... you loved me before the founding of the world”). Cyril’s conclusion is that in these texts Jesus “plainly declares, ‘The glory which I have with thee is from eternity.’” Yet, not once in any of these texts do the words “from eternity” appear!

In spite of this, Cyril takes all of these references to Jesus’ preexistence in these texts to involve an eternal existence. But he does not isolate John 8:58 as specifically involving the use of a divine name, and he does not attempt to compare the present *eimi* with the birth of Abraham in order to make his point. Cyril certainly does not invoke some absolute sense for *ego eimi*, one where it is thought to include the idea of eternity. What Cyril does with John 8:58 is the same thing he does with John 8:56,

“time,” humans regularly view and treat it as a discernable measurement of events, actions, thoughts, or periods. This “measurement” (time) is done in relation to accepted (usually highly predictable [such as the apparent movement of the sun across the sky]) sequences that progress from event to event, from act to act, from thought to thought, or from one point in a period to another point in that same or in some other period (such as we find in a period of “life,” or the period of discernable and measurable sequences [days, months, and years] in which a person lives). Anything that is measurable in this way is “in time,” because it is being measured as it occurs or as things occur in relation to it. Viewed and used this way, “time” can be as old as the first act that occurred and that could be viewed by Jah himself in relation to some other act (or thought, etc.) that is in any way sequential to it. Philosophically, speculatively, people can say whatever they want about “time.” But I have good reasons for defining “time” according to our and other people’s (of times past) usage of time. These good reasons include our own evaluable treatment and use of time which is evidently accepted as it is shared and acted upon by people each day. For some additional discussion about “time” and about beliefs based on good reasons, see my “The People of God, Part Two: ‘On the Side of the Truth,’” published online through *IN MEDIO* 2.4 (April 1, 2007 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-16, on <http://www.elihubooks.com>.

John 17:5, and John 17:24: Cyril reads into the preexistence that is taught in these texts his belief in the eternality of the Son.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393 to c. 468 CE). Theodoret wrote what has come to be called his *Dialogues*. In these *Dialogues* Theodoret argues in support of the teaching that Jesus has two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. Theodoret also argues that there are occasions in the Bible where Jesus' two natures are evident. One of Theodoret's arguments is as follows: "He [Jesus] calls Nazareth and Capernaum His country, and again he exclaims 'Before Abraham was I am.' You will find the divine Scripture full of similar passages, and they all point not to one nature but to two."⁹⁶

However, these texts together only really show that Jesus *had* a divine nature at one point (that is, *before* he came to earth as a man [John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:5-9]), and that during another time he had a human nature. So regardless of how Theodoret wants to use John 8:58, the text itself only shows that Jesus lived before he came to earth, and it is this prehuman existence that Theodoret contrasts with Jesus' earthly homes in Nazareth and in Capernaum. So it seems that John 8:58 is again used to prove Jesus' preexistence, even if it is also used to prove something it does not teach, namely, that Jesus has two natures (human and divine) though he is all the while only one person (see my discussion on pages 214-220 and on pages 153-154 of Chapter 2).

John Chrysostom (c. 350 to 407). In his Homilies on the Gospel of John, John Chrysostom tries to explain John 7:16, 17 so that it is consistent with his theology. This will become clear as I discuss Chrysostom's presentation of these texts.

Chrysostom claims that Jesus' words in John 7:16, 17 should be understood as follows: "It is 'His,' because He spake it not as one who had been taught; and it is 'not his,' because it was the doctrine of the Father" (49.2).⁹⁷ This explanation, namely, that Christ spoke "*not as one who had been taught*," flies directly into the face of John 8:28 where Jesus himself says, "the Father

⁹⁶ NPNF, Second Series, vol. 3, Dialogue II, page 194.

⁹⁷ NPNF, First Series, vol. 14, page 177.

taught me.” Yet, when it comes to the citation and the discussion of this part of John 8:28, in his “Homily on St. John” Chrysostom omits Jesus’ reference to having been “taught” by the Father.⁹⁸

Chrysostom understands texts like John 7:17, 18 simply as manifestations of Jesus’ humility. According to Chrysostom, these are occasions where Jesus “desired not the honor of the many,” for Jesus everywhere desired to “persuade [others] that He Himself loveth not glory” (49.2). It is in this context that Chrysostom quotes John 8:58 and notes that the Jews who heard what Jesus said would likely not have been offended if they had “continually heard high expressions” from Jesus. While there is more than one ‘high expression’ in John 8:58 (one of which is preexistence and the other is priority to Abraham), I cannot determine the full extent of Chrysostom’s interpretation of Jesus’ preexistence or how he interpreted John 8:58 based on this quotation of his Homily on John’s Gospel. However, later on in this Homily (55.2) Chrysostom makes his view of Jesus’ words in John 8:58 more clear:

But wherefore said He not, “Before Abraham was, I was, instead of I Am”? As the Father useth this expression, “I AM,” so also doth Christ; for it signifieth continuous Being, irrespective of all time. On which account the expression seemed to them to be blasphemous.

Chrysostom here falls victim to the same false assumptions that informed Athanasius’ view, namely, assumptions about “I am” that do not result from any good reasons in the Bible (like Chrysostom’s “continuous Being, irrespective of all time.” Such views instead contradict the uses of “I am” (*ego eimi*) in the OT LXX and in the NT, uses considered earlier in this chapter. Chrysostom’s view of John 8:58 (as represented above) is not so clear after considering his final citation of John 8:58, found in his Homily on the Gospel of Matthew. Here Chrysostom takes up the

⁹⁸ See his citation and discussion of Joh 8:28, 29, in NPNF, First Series, vol. 14, pages 191-192. There are no NT Greek manuscripts that omit these words according to Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: John*, page 115, yet Chrysostom omits them.

issue of Jesus' 'lowliness of mind,' and Chrysostom cites several examples from the Bible where "others have said greater things of Him than He of Himself" (16.2). One such example is related by Chrysostom as follows:

For this cause many times, having in His own person said much that is lowly of Himself, the great things He leaves to be said by others. Thus He Himself indeed, reasoning with the Jews, said, 'Before Abraham was, I AM:' but His disciple not thus, but, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

The translation of "I AM" in all capitals and the use of "God" in the final part of the quotation from John 1:1 above ("the Word was God") are by the choice of the Eerdmans edition's translator. Those issues aside for now, Chrysostom clearly saw in John 1:1 something that qualifies as a "great thing" said not by Jesus himself, but by "others." But this is written in *contrast* to what Chrysostom perceives as an example of a "lowly" thing said by Jesus himself in John 8:58! While we cannot know for sure just how Chrysostom understood John 8:58, other than as represented in the quotations above, he appears to view what is said by Jesus in John 8:58 as in some sense a "lowly" claim in comparison to the "great" thing said about him by others in John 1:1.

Chrysostom does not show an awareness of the uses of *ego eimi* in the LXX and in the NT with an unexpressed but understood predicate, and he does not recognize anything but "continuous Being, irrespective of all time" as a legitimate reason for the Jews' attempt to stone Jesus. In the next section I will argue that there are good reasons in the text itself and in its context that better account for the Jews' reaction to Jesus' words in John 8:58.

Augustine of Hippo (354 CE to 430 CE). Augustine cites John 8:58 on several occasions. For example, in his Expositions on the Book of Psalms he comments with respect to Psalm 93:2: "He who said, 'Before Abraham was, I am:' not before Abraham only, but before Adam: not only before Adam, but before all the

angels, before heaven and earth.”⁹⁹ Augustine said essentially the same thing when he earlier alluded to John 8:58 in his comments on Psalm 76: “But as regards the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, wherein He is equal with the Father, He is not only before the Jews, but also before Abraham himself; nor only before Abraham, but also before Adam; nor only before Adam, but also before Heaven and earth and before ages.”¹⁰⁰

In saying the above, Augustine shows that “before Abraham” is limited in terms of its reference point, for he writes that Jesus’ preexistence is not “*only* before Abraham” but “*also* before Heaven and earth and before ages.” Therefore, while Augustine clearly believed Jesus was eternal, his use of John 8:58 in reference to Jesus’ existence as ‘not only before Abraham,’ together with his “but also before Heaven and earth and before ages,” shows that the period of time indicated by Jesus in John 8:58 (at least for Augustine) did not reach as far back as his existence before these other periods, periods which Augustine references in association with Jesus’ statement in John 8:58.

This review of the history of John 8:58 from Ignatius of Antioch to Augustine of Hippo reveals that among these early Christian writers John 8:58 was primarily used to support the belief that Jesus had a prehuman existence. While several of these writers (including Athanasius and John Chrysostom) associated an absolute idea of eternality with the expression “I am,” even where this expression has an expressed predicate such as in “*I am* the truth” or “*I am* the Shepherd,” that is not what is taught in the text of John 8:58 or in other NT or OT texts that use the Hebrew or Greek expressions for “I am.” In his third discourse against the Arians (3.23.6), Athanasius also wrote that “I am” is a title of God, but nowhere in the Bible is it so used.

Having now considered what many early writers had to say about John 8:58, and how they used it in their arguments against others and in support of their own theology, I will now offer my own interpretation of John 8:58. I will consider the grammar of

⁹⁹ NPNF, First Series, vol. 8, page 458.

¹⁰⁰ NPNF, First Series, vol. 8, page 355.

the text, its place in its immediate context, and how it can be understood in association with the other uses of *ego eimi* in the NT and in the OT. I will also give considerable attention to the arguments put forth by those who have advanced Trinitarian understandings of this text similar to those considered above. Many of these Trinitarian arguments have been put forth against the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and against the translation of John 8:58 in the *New World Translation*.

The Preexistence of the Christ in John 8:58

I now turn to the final section of this chapter, in which I will consider the meaning and the translation of Jesus' words as recorded in John 8:58, as well as the Jews' response to him. In one sense, *ego eimi* in John 8:58 appears to convey a meaning different from the uses of *ego eimi* in those texts considered earlier in this chapter, texts that involve simple self-identification ("It is I") or an identification of Jesus as the "Christ" or the "Son of man." I say this in part because in John 8:57 the Jews ask Jesus how he (a man 'not yet fifty years old') could possibly have seen Abraham.¹⁰¹ As noted earlier, this question was asked in response to Jesus' claim that Abraham had seen Jesus' "day" and "rejoiced" (verse 56). Jesus answers the Jews in verse 58 with the words, "Truly I say to you, before Abraham came to be *ego eimi* (Greek: πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί).

The use of *ego eimi* in this verse has been understood by different Bible translators as "I am" (NASB¹⁰²), "I AM" (J.B. Phillips), "I existed" (C.B. Williams' New Testament), "I was" (W.F. Beck), and "I have been" (NWT). But why the differences, and which translation is more accurate?

¹⁰¹ Though the reading καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἑώρακέν σε ("and Abraham has seen you?") is supported by ⲛ* P⁷⁵ Sy^s 070 Sahidic and Coptic manuscripts and other witnesses, the reading, "You have seen Abraham" fits better with Jesus' claim to have seen Abraham "rejoice" in light of the fact that Abraham is said to have "seen" Jesus' "day," not the prehuman Jesus himself. But consider the arguments presented by Tjitze Baarda, "John 8:57B: The Contribution of the Diatessaron of Tatian," *NovT* 38.4 (1996), pages 336-343.

¹⁰² The 1960-1973 NASB editions contain the alternate reading, "I have been."

Viewing εἰμί (*eimi*) as “absolute.” Well-known Greek grammarian A.T. Robertson once claimed that another well-regarded Greek grammarian, G.B. Winer, “exerted a pernicious influence” over scholars who would have otherwise accepted passages such as Titus 2:13 as affirming the “Deity of Christ.”¹⁰³ I have elsewhere argued that Robertson and those who have followed him in condemning Winer’s view of certain grammatically ambiguous NT texts have failed to fully consider important grammatical facts that contradict their understanding of *eimi* in John 8:58.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, I believe it is fair to say that if Winer has in fact exerted “a pernicious influence” over the translation and understanding of passages like Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, then Robertson and other Trinitarians have exerted an even greater influence over the interpretation of John 8:58.

For example, in his large grammar Robertson writes, “In Jo. 8:58 εἰμί [*eimi*] is really absolute.”¹⁰⁵ His words here are spoken in the context of his discussion of the idiom Robertson calls the “progressive present” and “the present of past action still in progress.” This last named idiom is also known today as the “Extension from Past,” which I will discuss further in the next sub-section. But in one brief sentence Robertson was able to distance *eimi* in John 8:58 from what he calls the “progressive present.” Yet, Robertson offers no arguments in support of his labeling *eimi* in John 8:58 as “absolute.” He merely writes that it “is really absolute.”

When you consider that Robertson (a scholar who possessed considerable Greek grammatical knowledge) offers no arguments in support of his claim, it cannot help but raise the question of *why* he believes *eimi* in John 8:58 is “really absolute.” What

¹⁰³ A.T. Robertson, “The Greek Article and the Deity of Christ,” *The Expositor*, 8th Series, vol. 21 (1921), page 187.

¹⁰⁴ See my Excursus on Sharp’s rule on pages 367-410 of my Second Edition of this book (2000), now available online in the Elihu Books Topical Index under “G,” “J,” and “S.” See also my more recent article, “Another Exception to Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin: A Further Response to Dan Wallace (With an Appendix),” *Elihu Online Papers* 2 (July 26, 2010 [revised January 30, 2012]).

¹⁰⁵ A.T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), page 880.

Robertson means is that, as discussed earlier, (*ego eimi*) requires no expressed or implied predicate (like "Christ") to complete its meaning. But, as knowledgeable as Robertson may have been in Greek grammar, true scholarly analysis looks at the evidence, and only at the evidence; it does not rely solely on opinion absent such analysis. Yet, in his grammar Robertson provides no such analysis in support of his opinion about *eimi* in John 8:58 being "really absolute." His "pernicious influence" is still felt today, as I will show in the discussion that follows.

In his *Word Pictures* series Robertson had a bit more to say regarding his view of *eimi* in John 8:58. There he refers to *ego eimi* as "the absolute phrase used of God." In support of his view, Robertson points to the contrast between the verbs *eimi* and *ginesthai* in John 8:58, as if this alone proves that *eimi* conveys "timeless being."¹⁰⁶ Below I will argue that Robertson and others have greatly exaggerated the significance of these two verbs in this text, or at least they have gone too far when attempting to interpret the contrasted existences (Abraham's and Jesus'). Surprisingly, Robertson cites John 9:9 as one of five parallels to the use of *ego eimi* by Jesus in John 8:58! But in John 9:9 *eimi* is not "really absolute." It must be completed by a predicate such as "he" or "the one born blind."

Robertson's citation of John 9:9 as a parallel to *ego eimi* in John 8:58 shows that he did not carefully consider the possible uses of the predicateless *ego eimi* in the NT. While he may have mistakenly referred to John 9:9 as comparable to the use of *ego eimi* in John 8:58 (that is, in terms of how he understands each verse), the fact is that in one sense the use of *ego eimi* in both John 8:58 and 9:9 is similar. Though the man whom Jesus healed uses the same words as Jah in the LXX OT and as Jesus does in the NT, clearly the meaning in each case is not the same. That is the very point I am trying to highlight in relation to the use of *ego eimi* in the OT and in the NT, and here in particular as it concerns John 8:58 and its unique grammatical and contextual features.

¹⁰⁶ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), pages 158-159.

The “Extension from Past” idiom. As noted earlier, Robertson believes *eimi* in John 8:58 is “really absolute” in that it conveys “timeless being.”¹⁰⁷ However, his view of *eimi* is not based on the best available reasons, which reasons include the use of *eimi* and other present verbs used together with expressions of past time in other NT and OT LXX texts.¹⁰⁸ In fact, in non-poetic contexts it really makes little to no sense at all to use an absolute expression intended to convey “timeless being” together with an expression of past time. If Robertson’s view is correct, then in John 8:58 Jesus’ words mean something like, “Before Abraham came into existence I am eternal” (or “I eternally existed”). If the

¹⁰⁷ Some Trinitarians seem to view *ego eimi* as an absolute expression denoting eternal existence, as well as an actual divine name. Robert Morey, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Word Publishing, 1996), page 364, claims that Jesus “used the divine name ἐγὼ εἰμι [*ego eimi*] in reference to Himself.” But Barnabas Lindars, “The Son of Man in Johannine Christology,” in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament, In Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, eds. B. Lindars and S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), page 54, note 25, points out that *ego eimi* in Joh 8:58 “cannot be regarded as a title, because it requires the meaning ‘I am in existence.’” To illustrate, we would not say in translation, “Before Abraham came into existence Jesus,” or “Before Abraham came into existence God.” Missing from both is “I am” which is the very expression believed by Morey to be a divine name! The only way Jesus could be using a title or name in Joh 8:58 is if it is in the form of an implied predicate, such as “Christ,” “God,” or some other name or title that comes from the context. If anything, as I will argue below, “Christ” is the only predicate that fits with the context of Joh 8:58. Though Lindars is correct in his remarks concerning the implied predicate of Joh 8:24 and 28 (“The Son of Man in Johannine Christology,” page 53), he is too dependent on the use of *ego eimi* with the expressed predicate “light of the world” in Joh 8:12, and he places too much emphasis on a possible relationship between Joh 8:28 and Isa 43:10 (concerning which, see my note 34).

¹⁰⁸ Charles H. Kahn, “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being,” *FL* 2.3 (August 1966), pages 245-265, points out that absolute uses of *eimi* are not even always existential. Kahn writes that “the traditional dichotomy between the existential and the predicative use of the verb would have to be rejected for Greek as a hopeless oversimplification” (Kahn, “The Greek Verb ‘To Be,’” page 259). As I will explain in this section, I believe there are good reasons for viewing *eimi* in Joh 8:58 existentially (that is, to denote existence), but not as “absolute,” in association with an expression of past time and possibly also with an implied predicate similar to many of the other uses of *ego eimi* in John, in the Synoptics, and in the LXX. Kahn also highlights the “durative connotations” of *einai* (the infinitive form of *eimi*) in the Greek philosopher Parmenides (c. 510-c. 450 BCE), in contrast to the “developmental idea of birth” in *ginesthai*. This contrast will be considered further below in relation to the use of these same verbs in Joh 8:58.

use of *eimi* by itself here absolutely conveys the eternality of the subject (Jesus), then why does Jesus associate this eternality with a time “*before Abraham*”? If *eimi* here by itself conveys “timeless being,” then Jesus could simply have responded only with *ego eimi*, without any direct mention of his being “before Abraham,” because his absolute use of *ego eimi* would have included such a notion clearly enough!

However, those who do not view *eimi* here as “absolute” can see a clear reason for why *eimi* is used with an expression of past time in John 8:58. An idiom called the “Extension from Past” (EP) by Kenneth L. McKay occurs when a present verb (such as *eimi*) is “used with an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications.”¹⁰⁹ In John 8:58 we have all of the components for this idiom. There is the present verb “(I) am” (*eimi*) used with an expression of past time (“before Abraham came into existence” [*prin Abraam genesthai*]). In such a situation, the “past and present are gathered up in a single affirmation ... the full meaning is that something has been and still is.”¹¹⁰

So when Leon Morris writes that Jesus said “I am” not “I was”¹¹¹ (that is, we find *eimi* not the verb ἦν [*en*] or ἦμην [*emen*]¹¹²), I readily acknowledge this is true because the present *eimi* signals that the existence *continues* to the present time. In other words, what Jesus says is not an assertion *only* of

¹⁰⁹ K.L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek* (SBG 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1994), page 41.

¹¹⁰ James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, typeset ed. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1979 [1988]), page 84. Brooks and Winbery label this idiom the “Durative Present,” but they do not specifically refer to Joh 8:58 as an example of it.

¹¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), page 474. This argument is also used by E.C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), page 349; Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, page 122; Harner, *The “I AM” of the Fourth Gospel*, page 39, note 73; Morey, *The Trinity*, page 364. See also my quotation of Chrysostom on page 271.

¹¹² But note that the Peshitta uses the time-indifferent particle of existence *ith*, as it contains the rendering *’ena ithai* which, similar to the English participle, must take its time from the context. However, the Curetonian has an excellent translation that preserves the present and the past elements found in the Greek, *’ena ith hawith* (“I is was”)! One late cursive (157) actually reads, ἐγὼ ἦμην (“I was”).

preexistence, but of an existence that *extends from the past to the present*. The Greek verbs for “was” would not convey this notion of continuous existence, even when used with an expression of past time, because they do not contain the necessary present sense that we find in *eimi*. In addition to McKay, those commentators and grammarians accepting John 8:58 as an example of the aforementioned idiom include Meyer, Tholuck, Sanders and Mastin, Winer, Blass and Debrunner, and Turner.¹¹³ So it would be wrong to think that Robertson represents the totality of scholarly opinion on *eimi* as used in John 8:58.

In addition to his comments regarding John 8:58 as a text containing an instance of the “Extension from Past” idiom, McKay offers a translation of John 8:58, namely, “I have been in

¹¹³ Meyer, *The Gospel of John*, page 293; Tholuck, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, page 243; Sanders and Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, page 236; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), page 168, sec. 322 (cited erroneously as John 5:58); McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in NT Greek*, pages 41-42; Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), page 62, sec. 1(c); George Benedict Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, trans. J. Henry Thayer (Andover: Warren Draper, 1897), page 267. See also John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1858), who on page 370 writes: “*Before Abraham was made, I was: and at this day, at so long an interval after the death of Abraham, I am. ... Thus the particle before and the present I am, elegantly cohere. ... the present is often so put, as that the past time is included; Luke xv. 29 ... Ps. xc. 2 ... Prov. viii. 25 ... Jer. i. 5.*” Below I will consider several OT LXX parallels to the grammar of Joh 8:58, but note here that Bengel cites Prov 8:25 as a parallel. Indeed it is perhaps the most significant parallel to Joh 8:58, not only because it uses past expressions (*pro tou ore hedasthenai, pro de panton bounon*; “before the mountains were set, and before all the hills”) with a present verb (*genna*; “he begets”), but also because the one begotten is none other than the being of Wisdom! In the NT “W/wisdom” is identified as the preexistent Word who was “with God” and who “became flesh” in the man Jesus of Nazareth (see my discussion of Wisdom in Chapter 4, pages 314-316 and in Chapter 5, pages 406-418). In the case of Prov 8:25, glorious creation and existence are attributed to Wisdom by the use of *genna*, which translates the Hebrew verb *hul* (also used in verse 24 but not translated by the LXX) meaning ‘born’ or ‘brought forth’ (compare Ps 51:5) and by the LXX’s use of *ktizo* (“create”) for the Hebrew verb *qanah*, which means to “acquire” or to “create” (compare Gen 4:1; Prov 4:5 [for the acquisition of the attribute of “wisdom”]) in verse 22. Further, this temporality is made clear in the LXX also by the use of the verb *themelio*’o (to ‘lay the foundation of’ or to ‘establish’ something [compare Prov 3:19; Ps 23:2]) in verse 23, which translates the Hebrew verb *nasak* (to “weave together” [compare Job 10:11; Ps 139:13]).

existence since before Abraham was born.”¹¹⁴ Trinitarian Greek grammarian Daniel B. Wallace considers McKay's view of *eimi* in John 8:58 as a present extending from the past more “nuanced” than those who view *eimi* as a historical present, but Wallace nonetheless believes that “John 8:58 lacks sufficient parallels to be convincing.”¹¹⁵ Yet, Wallace does not specify what kind of “parallels” he has in mind, though he likely is referring to other uses of *eimi* as an extending-from-the-past present. But if this is true, then at least two examples from the NT could be cited (John 14:9; 15:27) and no less than six examples from the LXX could be provided.—Genesis 31:38, 41; Exodus 4:10; 21:36; Judges 16:17; Psalm 90:2.

Even if we had no other examples of *eimi* functioning as part of this idiom, this would not be sufficient grounds for dismissing

¹¹⁴ K.L. McKay, “Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek,” *NovT* 34 (1992), page 212; *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek*, page 42; “‘I am’ in John’s Gospel,” *ExpT* 107.10 (1996), page 302. McKay’s use of “since” in his translation is appropriate because it does not imply a beginning but simply a point of reference from which the present *eimi* extends. Nothing is “added” to the text by using “since,” because the idiom used supports its use in English translation. Jesus here claims to have existed from a time before Abraham’s birth, but he does not specify the extent of his preexistence other than by saying that it predates the birth of Abraham. Jesus himself may be eternal, or he may not be (see Chapter 5). The text of Joh 8:58 by itself does not tell us anything more specific than that Jesus existed “before Abraham was born” and up to the present. Therefore, we again have a direct link between Jesus of Nazareth and the preexistent Word of God (John 1:1). But like the other examples of the EP idiom that I will discuss below, it is the context (immediate and larger) that will make clear for us whether Jesus’ existence before Abraham was eternal or temporal, as God’s “firstborn.”—Col 1:15; Heb 1:6; both texts discussed in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), page 531, note 48. At one time Jehovah’s Witnesses viewed *eimi* in Joh 8:58 as a “historical present” (see, “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1957, pages 126-127). Even Wallace agrees that this view would not be impossible (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, page 530, note 47). Jehovah’s Witnesses, however, have since changed their view of *eimi* in Joh 8:58 from a historical present to an “Extension from Past” present, as they believe the present verb associated with an expression of past time is used in Joh 8:58 to denote past existence that continues into the present. This change took place as far back as 1984, which is why Wallace’s citation of the historical present in relation to the Witnesses’ view of Joh 8:58 twelve years later (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pages 530-531) is so surprising. For a discussion of the different NWT and KIT footnotes to Joh 8:58, see my answer to the question, “Why do different editions of the *New World Translation* contain different footnotes to John 8:58?” in “*Upon the Lampstand*” (December 17, 2009), pages 1-15 (available on <http://www.elihubooks.com>).

such a use in John 8:58 if in fact the components of this idiom are found. Since the necessary components clearly are present in John 8:58 (namely, a present verb and an expression of past time), we can then compare its use here with other instances of the EP idiom, and then interpret these texts according to the verbs and past expressions used. For example, if we consider the use of the present verb for “I am serving” (Greek: δουλεύω, *douleuo*) in Luke 15:29, based on its use with a past expression (“so many years”) it is clearly an example of an EP present.

If I adopted Wallace’s approach, then I might claim that *douleuo* “lacks sufficient parallels to be convincing”! I might also hesitate to accept the present verb for “you are thinking” (Greek: δοκέω, *dokeo*) in 2 Corinthians 12:19 together with the past expression “long ago” (Greek: πάλαι, *palai*) as an instance of the EP idiom simply because *dokeo* “lacks sufficient parallels.” The truth is, there *are* a sufficient number of parallel uses of *eimi* to John 8:58 ‘to be convincing.’

However, while we do have several examples where *eimi* is used as an EP present, we should not expect to find too many contexts where *eimi* is used to highlight someone’s prehuman existence. That, of course, is a rather unique claim! This is what makes Wallace’s concerns over “sufficient parallels” even more perplexing, as if this is somehow unexpected. In any event, John 8:58 has all of the necessary components of the defined EP idiom, namely, a present verb (*eimi*, “I am”) and an expression of past time (“before Abraham came into being”). This view of *eimi* not only fits perfectly with the described EP idiom, but the EP idiom fits perfectly well here in the context of Jesus’ discussion with the Jews in John 8:56-59.

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, in John 8:56 Jesus reflects on his personal observation of Abraham ‘rejoicing’ at the prospect of ‘seeing [Jesus’] day.’ As a result of Jesus’ personal reflection on events that took place before he was born as a man, the Jews ask how it is that he, a man “not yet fifty years old,” could possibly have “seen Abraham” (verse 57). The EP idiom in verse 58 directly answers this question by explicitly revealing what was indicated by what Jesus said according to verse 56: He

existed not only before he was born as a man but also before Abraham himself was born, and *that* is how he could speak about those things that happened during Abraham's lifetime.

With these facts in mind, any translator of John 8:58 should have little trouble recognizing a sense for the present *eimi* that is a part of the EP idiom used, especially since "the tenses of ancient Greek do not signal time except by implication from their relationship to their context."¹¹⁶ McKay also argues that Jesus' response in verse 58 would be most naturally translated as he has done (namely, "I have been in existence since before Abraham was born") "if it were not for the obsession with the simple words 'I am.'" McKay then writes:

If we take the Greek words in their natural meaning, as we surely should, the claim to have been in existence for so long is in itself a staggering one, quite enough to provoke the crowd's violent reaction.¹¹⁷

I will discuss the Jews' reaction in verse 59 in greater detail later in this chapter. But to show once again how the context must be carefully considered when seeking to determine the time indicated by the EP idiom, consider the example McKay cites from Romans 11:7. McKay argues convincingly that Paul's use of the present verb for "is seeking" (Greek: ἐπιζητεῖ, *epizetei*) is not an "especially significant reference to past seeking but an all-embracing *has been seeking*." This makes good sense in a context where Paul refers to Israel's past *and* to their present "seeking," for Paul "is looking for a reaction from the salvation of the gentiles to prompt a redirection of Israel's zeal into the right channel of faith, in order to add to the present-day remnant."¹¹⁸

Trinitarian apologist Robert M. Bowman, Jr. has expressed disagreements with the view that *eimi* is part of the EP idiom. Part of the reason for his disagreement is that "most grammars

¹¹⁶ McKay, *Syntax*, page 39.

¹¹⁷ McKay, "'I am' in John's Gospel," page 302.

¹¹⁸ McKay, "Time and Aspect," pages 210-212.

specifically state that accompanying the present tense verb is some adverbial expression indicating the extent of the duration of the time indicated by the verb.”¹¹⁹ Bowman then refers to Greek grammarians Burton, Goodwin, Dana and Mantey, and Robertson as among those who support his position. But Bowman misquotes each and every single one of these grammars on this point! Again, according to Bowman the grammars authored by the above grammarians (with additional underlining added) “specifically state that accompanying the present tense verb is some adverbial expression indicating the extent of the duration of the time indicated by the verb.” A simple check of Bowman’s quotations from these grammars reveals that not one of them says anything about “the extent of the duration of the time.”

Indeed, Bowman’s quotation of Burton simply states that the adverbial expression ‘denotes duration’ and ‘refers to past time.’ In Bowman’s quotation of Dana and Mantey they merely state that the present verb is “generally associated with an adverb of time,” while Bowman’s citation of Robertson reveals that “usually an adverb of time (or adjunct) accompanies the verb.” Bowman also tries to enlist Goodwin in support of his view about an adverbial expression denoting “the extent of the duration,” when in fact Bowman’s own quotation of Goodwin’s grammar makes it clear that Goodwin refers only to a present verb occurring with the Greek expression of past time *παλαι* (*palai*, “a long time”), “or any other expression of past time.”

Not one of these grammars says what Bowman has them saying, namely, that the present verb in the EP idiom is accompanied by “some adverbial expression indicating the extent of the duration of the time.” For example, *palai* (“a long time” [see discussion on page 281]) in 2 Corinthians 12:19 clearly does not convey “the extent of the duration of the time”! Though McKay does state that in the EP idiom the present verb is “used with an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications” (underlining added), McKay does not limit the

¹¹⁹ Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), page 105 (underlining added).

occurrence of this idiom to instances where the “extent of the duration” is expressed. For McKay, it may be “either” an “expression of past time” *or* an expression denoting “extent of time with past implications.”

Though various grammarians (such as those cited above) specifically state that the present verb only needs to (“generally” or “usually”) be accompanied by “an adverb of time” (Dana and Mantey, Robertson), an “expression of past time” (Goodwin), or “an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications” (McKay), Bowman goes much further when he claims:

In each case, the relevant adverbial expression defines (whether in a vague, general manner or very specifically and exactly) the period and extent of the duration of the verb. These adverbial clauses make it explicit that the action or condition described by the present tense verb is a temporal one that began at some point in the past.¹²⁰

Bowman then cites several texts that he believes support his view as expressed above (Luke 13:7; 15:29; John 5:6; 14:9; 15:27; 1 John 3:8; Acts 15:21; 2 Corinthians 12:19; 2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 3:4; 1 John 2:9). Bowman then concludes (with underline added), “All of these expressions refer to a period of time beginning at some point (whether specified or not) in the past and continuing up to the time of the speaker.”¹²¹

It is interesting to note Bowman’s claim that in “each case” the adverbial expression “defines (whether in a vague, general manner or very specifically and exactly) the period and extent of the duration of the verb.” Bowman also notes that, in his view, *all* “genuine” examples of this idiom “refer to a period of time beginning at some point (whether specified or not) in the past and continuing up to the time of the speaker.” But if this “beginning” is not “specified” then how can Bowman rightly claim that in

¹²⁰ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 109.

¹²¹ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 110.

each “genuine” instance of this idiom the “extent of the duration of the time” is “defined”? If the time indicated by the adverbial expression is so vague that no explicit “beginning” is indicated, how does this in any way define “the period and extent of the duration of the verb”? It does not. Any “beginning” would have to be read into the past expression from the context or from other teachings concerning the subject.

It seems to me Bowman’s Trinitarianism is the primary reason he tries to differentiate between the undefined extent of time Jesus gives to his existence prior to the birth of Abraham, and the other undefined time periods in texts where the EP idiom similarly occurs. In 2 Corinthians 12:19 and Luke 15:29 the time indicated by the past expressions is determined apart from anything communicated by the EP idiom itself. There are no good reasons against simply accepting the extent of Jesus’ preexistence as undefined according to John 8:58, though determinable based on other NT texts that teach about the same subject (see, for examples, the biblical texts discussed in Chapter 5). But it is not necessary, contrary to Bowman’s claim, to have the extent of the duration of the verb to be defined in order for us to have a true instance of the EP idiom.

Consider several more NT examples of the EP idiom, some of which use the verb *eimi* but without defining the extent of the duration of the verb, and some of which do not use *eimi* but are examples of the EP idiom that are helpful in further illustrating how this idiom is used:

John 14:9: In this text the NWT has Jesus saying to Philip, “Have I been with you men so long a time [Greek: *tosouton chronon met’ humon eimi*], and yet, Philip, you have not come to know me?” Here “so long a time” (*tosouton chronon*) has a past reference and modifies the present verb *eimi*, translated here as “have I been.” In English, we would not say it the same way as the Greek reads it, literally, “I am with you so much time.” Instead we ‘gather up the past and the present together in a single affirmation’ (Brooks and Winbery, based on their definition of this idiom [quoted on page 278]) by means of “have I been,” this in order to express the idea that “something has been and still is” (again, Brooks and Winbery’s definition of the idiom). In this case, we are dealing with Jesus’ ‘having been’ with them “for a long time.” But here “a long time” does not specify “the extent of the duration of the time.” Yet, both

Jesus and Philip, apart from what was actually said, knew how long they had been together. So it was not necessary for Jesus to give "the extent of the duration of the time," but only to note that it had been "a long time." "A long time" does not give us the "extent of the duration of the time." It is undefined, but that does not mean it is "timeless."

John 15:27: In this text Jesus says to his disciples, "You have been with me from the beginning" (*ap' arches met' emou este*). Here "from the beginning" (*ap' arches*) modifies the second-person present plural form of *eimi* (*este*) and it is also an expression of past time that tells us in a vague, undefined way how long they have been with Jesus, namely, from "the/his beginning." The use of "from" (*apo*) fits well with this instance of the EP idiom since the participants in the discussion (Jesus and his disciples) both knew when they 'began,' or how long they had been in association with each other. Still, *arche* does not tell us exactly *when* that association started, and so the "the extent of the duration of the time" is (again) undefined. Therefore, if anyone argues for an understanding of *arche* such that, in this text (John 15:27), it is similar to the *arche* of John 1:1, then a rather interesting view of Jesus' relationship with his disciples might result. It might even be argued that Jesus here claimed some sort of preexistence for his disciples! Yet, by simply noting that there was a period of time where Jesus and his disciples were with each other, and by not trying to make more out of what is said than what can be reasonably argued from the immediate and larger contexts of Jesus' words, then this instance of the EP idiom will not be open to such misinterpretations. Jesus simply referred to a particular point from which he has been with his disciples without specifying the extent of the duration, because he knew that they knew what he meant by "from the/his beginning." In John 8:58 the Jews knew that Jesus claimed to exist before Abraham was born. Therefore, it was not necessary for Jesus to be more specific than he was by what he said in his response to them.

Luke 13:7 and 15:29: In Luke 13:7 Jesus gives an illustration about "a certain man" who says to a vinedresser, "Here it is three years that I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, but have found none" (NWT). The present verb is translated "I have come" (*erchomai* [by itself, "I am coming"] because it is used with an expression of past time ("three years" [*tria ete*])). Both the "man" and the "vinedresser" knew the period that is defined by "three years." Even if the vinedresser did not have direct knowledge of what the man told him (that is, if the vinedresser was not in the vineyard for the entire three years but instead came later) he would have had no problem relating to the point of reference for it is within his understanding of times and seasons on the earth during which the man in Jesus' illustration would have come looking for fruit. In Luke 15:29, in Jesus' illustration about the prodigal son, the son who stayed with his father laments, "so many years I have slaved for you" (*tosauta ete douleuo soi*). This is an expression of past time that does not specify the

“extent of the duration of the time.” But, obviously, both the son and his father knew what period of servitude was meant by “so many years” (*tosauta ete*), and so nothing more specific needed to be said.

Acts 15:21: In this text we are told, “For from ancient times there have been those in every town who proclaimed the Law of Moses” (William Barclay’s translation). A word-for-word (non-idiomatic) translation could read, “Moses for from generations ancient in every city those preaching him he has” (*Mouses gar ek geneon archaion kata polin tous kerussontas auton echei*). Here “from ancient times” (*ek geneon archaion*) does not specify “the extent of the duration.” We can, however, determine (at least approximately) the “extent of the duration of the time” by considering information from outside the text itself that pertains to the same subject. For example, the “ancient times” James speaks of in this verse must have had their start sometime after Moses received the Law from Jah, and they would have had to continue to the time when the words of Acts 15:21 were spoken. But the text itself, by means of the EP idiom alone, does not give us “the extent of the duration of the time.”

After looking at these additional examples of the EP idiom we must come back to John 8:58. It is clear that in this text we have the necessary EP idiom components, namely, an expression of past time (“before Abraham was born/came into being”) modifying a present verb (“I am”). As with all other instances of this idiom, whether the period or the extent of the duration of the time indicated is specified the translation should ‘gather up the past and the present together in a single affirmation,’ in order to express the idea that “something has been and still is.” In the case of John 8:58, it is Jesus’ existence “before Abraham was born” and the continuation of that existence to the present moment that must be ‘gathered up’ and expressed together in translation. This can be done in English by using “I have been.”

The only significant difference between the EP idiom in John 8:58 and the use of the same idiom in other texts is the past point of reference.¹²² In John 8:58 the full details about the time to

¹²² Another difference has to do with the fact that in John 8:58 it may be we are dealing specifically with Jesus’ individual existence prior to Abraham’s birth. Jesus’ existence “with” someone, as in John 14:9 and in 15:27, is not under consideration or in view at all. But the use of “with you” (14:9) or “with me” (15:27), or the lack of such an expression, has nothing to do with the EP idiom in the sense under discussion. Ultimately, all of the unique features in or associated with a text’s use of the EP idiom will have some bearing on the understanding of the particular EP idiom used. But many

which Jesus refers are not shared by both parties involved in the discussion, and that is for one very obvious reason: Only Jesus among those present existed before Abraham's birth! There really was no other way for Jesus to assert his *continual* existence from a time that would have allowed him to have "seen Abraham," in response to the Jews' question. Bowman, however, claims: "Had John wished to construct a clause that did indicate duration, he could have said something like, 'since (*apo*) Abraham came into existence'; but as it stands, *prin Abraam genesthai* does not fit the requirements of a clause indicating the duration of a PPA [EP] verb."¹²³

First of all, Bowman imposes his own 'requirement' for "a clause indicating the duration of a PPA [EP] verb." As I noted earlier, not one of the grammarians Bowman cites actually supports what he says about the "extent of the duration of the time" being 'required.' All of the grammarians cited by Bowman on this point simply mention an "expression of past time," an "adverb of time," and McKay (whom Bowman did not have the opportunity to cite) mentions both "an expression of either past time or extent of time with past implications" (underlining added).

Second, the use of *eimi* with an expression of past time such as "before Abraham was born" *does* "indicate duration" from the vague or undefined (meaning we are not sure at what point before Abraham's birth, if any, the existence began) past point of reference to the present moment. Thirdly, if Jesus had said *apo tes geneses tou Abraam ego eimi* ("I have existed from the birth of Abraham") it would have indicated Jesus was a being who lived only "from" the time of Abraham's birth forward, but not necessarily prior to that birth. So Bowman's suggested use of *apo*

of these differences do not change the fact the EP idiom is present in a text. Different accounts involving different people concerning different subject matters will exhibit differences to some degree. The only requirements for an EP present are 1) a present verb and 2) modification of the verb by an expression of past time or past implications from the context, *both* of which we find in Joh 8:58.

¹²³ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 110.

does not take into consideration the fact that Jesus' existence is not merely "from" that point, but "before" it.

In John 8:58 the use of *prin Abraam genesthai* ("before Abraham was born") tells us the truth about Jesus' preexistence, and at the same time it answers the Jews' question about how he had "seen Abraham." Further, since Jesus' existence predates the Jews' knowledge of history, there is nothing more Jesus needed to say or perhaps that he could have said in answer to them that would have provided the Jews with a past point of reference to which they could relate his answer, in this context. What Jesus wanted them to know and what *they* wanted to know was how Jesus had "seen Abraham." Jesus told them how this was possible: He existed before Abraham since that time.

I will consider several more examples that will help further illustrate this use of the EP idiom, particularly as they relate to Bowman's argument that "a clause beginning with *prin* [or *pro*, Greek prepositions meaning 'before'] cannot specify 'duration' up to the present, since it refers to a period *prior* to the past event specified in the clause."¹²⁴

The first problem with Bowman's argument involves an assuming that "duration" must be specified by the adverbial clause, though no one claims the adverbial clause 'specifies duration up to the present'! As I noted earlier, several grammars, including those cited by Bowman, make it clear a past expression *and* a present verb together denote duration from the past to the present.

Shifting the focus (as Bowman does) from a past expression modifying a present verb to only "a clause beginning with *prin*" ignores the role of the present verb in relation to the adverbial clause. This is how Bowman is able to disconnect the "'duration' up to the present" from the past expression. But we are not looking at the adverbial clause in isolation apart from the present verb! Indeed, it is the present verb that denotes duration (though not always the extent of the duration) from the time indicated by

¹²⁴ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 110.

the adverbial clause: "I am from before Abraham," or "I have been in existence since before Abraham was born."

Bowman's creation of an issue over the use of "before" (*prin* or *pro*) is also strange since this preposition is simply a part of the past reference of the entire adverbial clause. In John 8:58 Abraham's *birth* is not the past reference point; an undefined period of time prior to Abraham's birth is the past time to which Jesus referred and from which his existence extends. Jesus not only existed "from" Abraham's birth he existed "before" then birth, during Abraham's life, and to the point of John 8:58. Two additional examples of the EP idiom will further illustrate how an adverbial clause beginning with *prin* or *pro* (both meaning "before") can modify a present verb and convey existence or action (depending on the verb used) that continues from the past reference to the present. These two examples are from the Greek LXX, and they were first referenced in connection with this issue in my Second Edition of this book (Chapter 6, pages 273-274).

The first example is found in Exodus 4:10, where Moses confesses his inadequacy to God since he does not believe he is able to properly present Jah to the enslaved Israelites. The NWT renders the Hebrew text as follows, "I am not a fluent speaker, neither since yesterday nor since before that nor since your speaking to your servant, for I am slow of mouth and slow of tongue." The LXX offers a slight variation, which Brenton translates as, "I have not been sufficient in former times, neither from the time that thou hast begun to speak to thy servant: I am weak in speech, and slow-tongued." Brenton is here trying to capture the sense of the EP idiom used in the Greek text, which essentially says, "*I have not been [ouch eimi (present verb)] suitable before [pro] yesterday nor before [pro] the third day.*" Here again we have the necessary EP idiom components: a present verb (*eimi*) modified by an adverbial clause with past implications. In this case, as in John 8:58, the adverbial clause begins with *pro* ("before").

The second example of an adverbial clause beginning with *prin* or *pro*, where the clause modifies a present verb and conveys existence that continues from before an undefined past reference

point to the present, is in the LXX of Exodus 21:36. Here again we find a present verb (*estin* [a form of *eimi*]) used with the same *pro*-adverbial clause used in Exodus 4:10, “But if the bull is known *before* [*pro*] yesterday and *before* [*pro*] the third day to *have been* [*estin*] one that gores”¹²⁵ Here again the duration is “before” a particular event or time and it continues to the present. In Exodus 4:10 and 21:36, the duration is spoken of as from “before the third day” and to the present moment. The use of “before” as a part of the adverbial clause does not change the duration; rather, it helps identify the past point of reference from which the duration extends. In these examples, as with John 8:58, the “extent of the duration of the time” is not defined.

Since the adverbial expression in John 8:58 (like several other instances of the EP considered above) does not define a specific past point when Jesus’ existence began, then we must consult with other texts pertaining to the subject of his preexistence in order to determine if that preexistence had a beginning. John 8:58 cannot be used to prove Jesus had a beginning, and it cannot be used to prove he is an eternal being. It can only be used to show that according to the NT Jesus existed before Abraham’s birth, during Abraham’s lifetime, and up to the present moment of the events recorded in John Chapter 8. When we consider the full extent of what the Bible has to say about Jesus’ prehuman existence, it is clear he was created by Jah, the one whom he calls “God” and “Father” (Proverbs 8:22-24; Micah 5:2; John 5:26; 6:57; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 3:14). Several of these texts will be considered further in Chapter 5.

Before concluding this sub-section concerning the EP idiom found in John 8:58, there are still two more examples that I would like to consider. These two examples involve the existence or the duration of events having to do with Jah himself. Godet and Hoskyns¹²⁶ (among others) claim that Jesus’ words in John 8:58

¹²⁵ Some LXX manuscripts (500 and 628) read ἦμην (“I was”) instead of *eimi* in Ex 4:10, and in Ex 21:36 at least one manuscript (19’) uses ἦν (“it was”).

¹²⁶ Godet, *Commentary on John*, page 122; Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, page 349.

denote absolute, eternal existence and that they recall the words of Psalm 90:2 (89:2 in the LXX), which Brenton (with underlining added) translates, “Before the mountains existed, and before the earth and the world were formed, even from age to age, Thou art” (Greek: πρὸ [*pro*] τοῦ ὅρη γενηθῆναι καὶ πλασθῆναι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν οἰκουμένην καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος σὺ εἶ [*su ei*]). Because the subject is Jah, the one who does “according to his own will among the army of the heavens” (Daniel 4:35), everyone accepts what is said here in relation to his preexistence without limitation. But is there something about the EP idiom used here, by itself, that conveys Jah’s eternity and that might serve as a means of comparison for interpreting John 8:58 similarly, for Jesus’ preexistence?

In Psalm 90:2 it is the additional description (in Hebrew) of “from everlasting to everlasting” or (in Greek) “from age to age” that expressly conveys the idea of uninterrupted existence. In the Hebrew text the final part of the verse says “you are God,” while in the Greek translation there is only “you are” (Greek: σὺ εἶ, *su ei*).¹²⁷ The use of the present verb (“you are”) modified by an adverbial expression of past time involving *pro* (“before the mountains were born and the earth was formed”) does exactly the same thing that the present verbs and past expressions involving *pro* (“before”) do in Exodus 4:10, 21:36, and in John 8:58. They convey duration from an undefined past time to the present moment.

While examples of the EP idiom do not always “define the extent of the duration of the verb,” we can learn more about “the extent of the duration” or about the existence of the subject from the context, immediate and larger, of each account. In Psalm 90:2 we learn more about “the extent of the duration of the verb” by means of “from everlasting/age to everlasting/age.” But no such additional description is given for either “the bull” in the Exodus

¹²⁷ “God” may be an implied predicate in the Greek LXX in view of what is said about the subject, which subject in this context could only be “God.” But it is also possible that the LXX translators ignored the predicate (“God”) in the Hebrew text and intended to use the present verb “you are” with an expression of past time in order to convey the idea of existence as a part of the EP idiom, which together with the other descriptions about Jah in this verse reveal his eternal existence.

passages or for Jesus in John 8:58. Their existence is limited to what is said in each text and to what is taught elsewhere in the Bible.

The final example from the LXX that I will consider and that contains a present verb and “before” (*pro*) as part of the past-time adverbial expression, is Jeremiah 1:5. Here Brenton’s translation (with underlining) reads, “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee” (Greek: πρὸ [*pro*] τοῦ με πλάσαι σε ἐν κοιλίᾳ ἐπίσταμαι σε [*epistamai se* is a present verb and a pronoun meaning, “I know you”]). Here again a present verb is modified by a past expression involving “before,” and the past time is undefined and left open to interpretation based on what is taught elsewhere concerning the subject. In this text, the EP idiom with “before” as part of the adverbial clause tells us that the duration of the present verb (‘know’) extends from a time prior to Jeremiah’s ‘formation in the belly.’ There is nothing in this text that explicitly tells us Jah ‘knew Jeremiah eternally.’ We are only told that Jah knew Jeremiah “before” he was made. In fact, given the biblical teaching that Jah’s original purpose was for mankind to live apart from sin (see Chapter 7), and the fact that Jeremiah was born in sin (Job 14:4), it is reasonable to conclude Jah did not ‘know this sinful Jeremiah eternally before he was made.’

The language of Jeremiah 1:5 cannot help but remind us of David’s words: “My frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalm 139:15-16 [RSV]). What is said of Jeremiah has to do with Jah’s knowledge of what kind of person Jeremiah would become before he was ‘formed in the belly,’ even as Jah knew and told Manoah’s wife that she would give birth to one who would take the lead in saving Israel from the Philistines (Judges 13:5). This knowledge is not eternal, but based on what Jah chooses to know or to bring about in connection with his will and purpose, which I will discuss further in Chapter 7.

Jesus as the Christ in John 8:58. But does the use of *eimi*

in John 8:58 serve only as the present verb of the EP idiom? While the claim to have been in existence since “before Abraham was born” is itself astounding, there may be some relationship between John 8:58 and the use of *ego eimi* elsewhere in the NT as it relates to Jesus’ identity as the “Christ” or “Son of man.” Indeed, there are several contextual factors which suggest that in addition to being part of the EP idiom, *ego eimi* in John 8:58 is used in a manner consistent with other uses of *ego eimi* in John and in the Synoptic Gospels. These uses, considered earlier in this chapter, involve an unexpressed but implied predicate for *ego eimi* that identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah.

When it comes to the context of John 8:58, we have already seen how verses 24 and 28 both use *ego eimi* to identify Jesus as the “Christ,” or “Son of man.” Moving forward to verse 53 and the more immediate context of John 8:58, after Jesus tells the Jews, “If anyone observes my word, he will never taste death at all,” they ask him, “Who do you claim to be?” Jesus responds by pointing out the futility of self-glorification and he adds that the one whom the Jews say is their God is actually Jesus’ Father, the one who will glorify the Son (verse 54-55). Then in verse 56 Jesus says to them: “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (NIV). As noted earlier in this chapter, Jesus’ words prompt the Jews to ask him how he could possibly have “seen Abraham” when he is “not even fifty years old.” Jesus then responds by claiming to have been in existence “before Abraham was born.” But whose “day” (verse 56) was it that Abraham “saw,” and even “rejoiced” at seeing?

According to Hebrews 11, Abraham is one who though he did not receive the fulfillment of the promises, “saw them afar off” (verses 8-10, 13). Jah told Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18: “I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice” (RSV). Jesus’ words in John 8:56 reveal Abraham “looked forward to the

arrival of the promised Messiah,”¹²⁸ and Jah’s words in Genesis 22:17-18 may have given Abraham the assurance needed to have seen the “day” of the Messiah with the ‘eyes of faith’ indicated by Hebrews 11:13. Indeed, in Galatians 3:16 Paul specifically links the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18 with the identity of the “Christ”! So those who say that in John 8:58 “there is nothing to suggest ‘Messiah’ as a predicate”¹²⁹ should reconsider their position.

Freed also shows how this messianic interpretation is consistent with ideas expressed in Jewish literature which was likely authored between the first half of the second century BCE and the first century CE. Freed argues that, rather than understand John 8:58 as one of the clearest instances of the absolute (predicateless) use of *ego eimi*, “the meaning of the sentence in the mind of the writer was: ‘Before Abraham was, I, the Christ, the Son of God, existed.’”¹³⁰ Freed then concludes by writing, “By using *ego eimi* three times (8:24, 28, 58) in a section of marked controversy with the Jews, the writer characteristically has developed his presentation of Jesus as the Messiah hidden to Jewish understanding.”¹³¹

Based on the evidence presented above, it is very possible, even likely, that *ego eimi* in John 8:58 is both a part of the EP idiom and it is to be understood with an unexpressed but implied

¹²⁸ *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1991), sec. 69.

¹²⁹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)*, page 555; see also Bernard and McNeile, *Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 2, page 322. F. Büchsel, “ἐγίμῃ,” TDNT 2, pages 398-400, similarly fails to recognize the messianic associations of Joh 8:24, 28, 58 and 13:19, causing him to express disagreement with Zahn’s messianic view of 8:24, 28 and 13:19. Büchsel claims, “What is at issue is not so much what Jesus is as the fact that He is.” Actually, in these texts where *ego eimi* is used the emphasis is almost always related to questions about his identity, and so the use of *ego eimi* by Jesus has much more to do with *who* Jesus is than with “the fact that He is.” The only text where the emphasis might be more on his existence than on his identity is Joh 8:58. But here, too, Jesus’ identity as the Christ whose “day” Abraham “saw” is plainly in view, so much so that one of the Jews’ questions (8:54) to him was, “Who do you claim to be?”

¹³⁰ Edwin Freed, “Who or what was before Abraham in John 8:58?” *JSNT* 17 (1983), pages 52-59.

¹³¹ Freed, “Who or what was before Abraham in John 8:58?” page 57.

predicate (such as “Messiah,” “Christ,” or “Son of man”). This understanding of *ego eimi* has Jesus answering both, “Who do you claim to be?” (verse 53) and, “How is it that you have seen Abraham?” (verse 57). Jesus’ response also fits perfectly with the teaching of Micah 5:2, which speaks of the preexistence of the future ruler from Bethlehem, the Messiah, who would come in Jah’s name.

“They picked up stones to throw at him.” This leaves us with the final verse of John Chapter 8 and the Jews’ response to what Jesus said in John 8:58. According to verse 59, in response to Jesus the Jews “picked up stones to hurl at him [Jesus].” Does this indicate that the Jews believed Jesus had claimed to be the God of the Old Testament? Or did they simply realize and reject the messianic implications of Jesus’ words and his claim to have existed before Abraham, their “father” (John 8:39)? The evidence supports the latter view. It also fits perfectly with the way the Jews reacted to Jesus on other occasions where he claimed to be the Messiah. For example, consider Jesus’ trial before the high priest according to Mark 14:60-64 (with underlining added):

But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “I am [*ego eimi*]; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” And the high priest tore his garments, and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death [RSV].

This account shows clearly that “the Jews regarded [Jesus’] interpretation of and claim to messiahship as blasphemy.”¹³² There is nothing in the high priest’s question that suggests any other accusation against Jesus, and what they “heard” prior to condemning him to death was his own affirmation that he was “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed,” whom Jesus also revealed as the “Son of man” of Daniel, the one who would “come on the

¹³² Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah*, pages 258-59.

clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:13). The same or a very similar claim is made by Jesus in John 8:58, with the same reaction by the Jews in John 8:59 as the high priest and the others in Mark 14:60-64! When they realized the implications of Jesus’ claim to have existed before Abraham, as the Christ whose “day” Abraham “saw,” the Jews took up stones to stone him. They rejected his claim to be the Christ, as well as any suggestion that he was superior to their “father,” Abraham.¹³³

Several references to “blasphemy” in the writings of Josephus help further illustrate how the Jews of Jesus’ day could have interpreted his words as blasphemous without associating them in any sense with a claim to be God. For example, in his *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.180 Josephus refers to “blasphemous charges” that are made against the Jews which are “really seen as an attack against the lawgiver Moses, who is seen as speaking for God.”¹³⁴ In *Antiquities* 12.406 a connection is made “between blasphemy and attacking the people of God, especially the leadership.”¹³⁵ Finally, in *Antiquities* 20.115 a soldier “seized the Laws of Moses, that lay in one of those villages, and brought them out before the eyes of all present, and tore them to pieces; and this was done with reproachful language [Greek: *epiblasphemon*, ‘blasphemies’], and much scurrility” (Whiston’s translation). It is clear, then, that disrespect for God’s law and for his leadership was, for the Jews, tantamount to disrespecting God himself.

¹³³ Consider, too, this Midrash (a rabbinical investigation into the meaning of a particular text completed sometime after 200 CE) on the book of Psalms:

R. Yudan said in the name of R. Hama: In the time-to-come, when the Holy One, blessed be He, seats the lord Messiah at His right hand, as is said *The Lord saith unto my lord: “Sit at my right hand”* (Ps. 110:1), and seats Abraham at His left. Abraham’s face will pale, and he will say to the Lord: “My son’s son sits at the right, and I at the left!” [*The Midrash on Psalms*, William G. Braude, trans. (New Haven: Yale, 1959), page 261.]

Here Abraham is presented as upset over the Messiah’s place at God’s right hand! It should be no surprise, then, that those who viewed Abraham as their “father” (Joh 8:39) were also upset when Jesus claimed to have existed “before Abraham was born.”

¹³⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1998), page 54.

¹³⁵ Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation*, page 57.

Additionally, in the Qumran scrolls “blasphemy” is used for how God’s servants are treated (1QpHab 10.13) and of those who ‘open their mouth against the statutes of God’s covenant by saying, “They are not right”’ (CD-A 5.12; compare 5.21).¹³⁶ In the OT Apocrypha, “blasphemy” is used to characterize actions against God’s name, against his people, and against their holy places, such as the temple and its sanctuary (1 Maccabees 2:6-14; 2 Maccabees 8:2-4; compare 2 Maccabees 12:14; 15:24). In Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 3:16 the one who forsakes his father is “like a blasphemer” (*hos blasphemos*). This understanding is perhaps because of the position and the responsibility God is said to have given fathers according to Sirach 3:2.

When I consider the high priest’s declaration of “blasphemy” against Jesus upon hearing him affirm that he is the “Christ,” “the Son of the Blessed,” and the “Son of man,” together with the general understanding of blasphemy found in Jewish literature during this time, it is easy to understand why the Jews attempted to stone Jesus according to John 8:59: He claimed to be the Christ whose “day” Abraham “saw.” He also claimed to have “seen Abraham” by existing “before” him, showing his superiority¹³⁷ to the one whom the Jews believed Jesus was ‘not greater than.’—John 8:39, 53.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ James Charlesworth, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 2, *Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), page 21.

¹³⁷ Interesting in this connection is Satan’s statement to Michael the Archangel in the *Life of Adam and Eve* 14.3. After being told to “worship the image of God” (namely, “Adam”), Satan responds (with underlining added): “I will not worship one inferior and subsequent to me. I am prior to him in creation; before he was made, I was already made. He ought to worship me” (M.D. Johnson, “Life of Adam and Eve,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, James H. Charlesworth, ed. [New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985], page 262). This shows that there was a definite sense of superiority associated with one who existed before another. Johnson (“Life of Adam and Eve,” page 252) dates the original composition of this work from between 100 BCE to 200 CE, most probably “toward the end of the first Christian century,” with the Greek and Latin texts produced between that time and 400 CE.

¹³⁸ Other ancient Jewish references that speak of Abraham in exalted or elevated terms can be found in Philo (see *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.9, 83, 203 [compare 244]; *On the Cherubim* 18; *Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 5; *The Worse Attacks the Better* 159; *Posterity and Exile of Cain* 27, 174; *On the Giants* 62, 64; *On Sobriety* 17; *On the Change of Names* 69, 88, 152; *On Dreams* 1.70; 2.244; *On the Life of Moses* 1.76), in

Chapter Summary

In the NT Jesus of Nazareth is presented as a being who enjoyed a real personal existence “with God” before ‘descending from heaven’ to “become flesh” (John 1:1, 14; 3:13). Before coming to the earth, the prehuman Jesus existed in the glorious “form of God/a god,” a form that he gave up in exchange for the “form of a slave,” that of “a man” (John 17:5; Philippians 2:5-8). But even though Jesus existed “before Abraham was born,” the Bible does not teach that his existence was eternal. What it does teach about the beginning of Jesus’ prehuman, heavenly life will be considered further in Chapter 5.

Through the use of *ego eimi* in the NT Jesus’ identity as the “Christ,” as the “Son of man” of Daniel 7:13 is revealed. The Jews who opposed Jesus rejected his claim as the Messiah whose “day” Abraham ‘saw and rejoiced,’ and they rejected any idea that Jesus was superior to Abraham because he existed “before” his “birth.” Their rejection of him and of his claims can be seen from their attempt to stone Jesus (John 8:59), and ultimately in condemning him to death and execution by the Romans.—Mark 14:60-64; John 19:12.

While many Unitarians today and in times past have misinterpreted and misrepresented Jesus’ prehuman existence as it is taught in texts such as John 8:58, Trinitarians have from at least the time of Athanasius of Alexandria in the fourth century CE also misused John 8:58 and a number of other biblical texts concerning the existence and the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Often there are disputes between these groups and between Jehovah’s Witnesses that have to do with questions about Jesus’ existence and about his identity as it relates to his use of *ego eimi*. But as I discussed in Chapter 2, these disputes also involve the biblical words for “God” and “a god.” In the next chapter I will consider further the question of how it is that Jesus of Nazareth

the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (10.5-17; 14.2), and in the *Testament of Abraham* ([Recension A] 1.2, 5-6; 2.3; 4.6; 10.5-11, 13; 15.14-15; 16.9; 17.7; [Recension B] 13.9-10). Compare also Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.225, 256.

could at any time be considered “God” or “a god,” as Jehovah’s Witnesses believe, consistently with biblical monotheism or the belief in “one God, the Father.”—1 Corinthians 8:6.

4

Jesus as “God” and as “a god”

In a book subtitled, “The Case for the Deity of Christ,” Robert M. Bowman, Jr., and J. Ed Komoszewski claim that “there are many ways of defining the terms *deity*, *god*, or *God*,” and that one “basic functional definition is that a deity is an *object of prayer*.” While it is true that prayer is given to God in the Bible, Bowman and Komoszewski provide no historical discussion or even any modern source support for their “functional definition” of “deity, god, or God.” Rather, they appear simply to assume as true something about what it means to be “deity, god, or God” and *then* they argue since in the Old Testament (OT) only “the transcendent, omniscient, omnipotent God can hear the prayers of all people and respond to them as he chooses,” it must always be only this God “to whom we should turn in prayer.”¹

In addition to not really evaluating the terms “deity, god, or God” in order to get an understanding of how these terms are used in the Bible (and thereby gain an understanding of how such terms can be understood based on usage), Bowman and Komoszewski are not consistent in accepting who or how “the transcendent, omniscient, omnipotent God” “chooses” to “hear” and “respond” to the prayers of “all people.” If they were, then their functional definition of “deity, god, or God,” as it relates to the Bible, would have included within its scope the understanding that God can designate someone else to “hear” and/or to “respond” to prayers that are directed to such agents but *because* they are God’s agents who express only his will.

¹ Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), page 47.

Indeed, according to the Bible the identity of the “one God” is clear: He is “the Father” (1 Corinthians 8:6), as I argued based on additional good reasons in Chapter 2. The Bible also clearly teaches that there were many “sons of God” who were with God before the earth was made (Job 38:7), and that one being in particular, called “the Word” (Greek: *ho logos*), was “with God” before he “became flesh/a man” by being born as a human child through Mary (Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1, 14). This one, Jesus of Nazareth, was identified as “God’s Son” (Mark 1:9-11) and as a “mediator” between the “one God” and “men” (1 Timothy 2:5). The Son is also said to perfectly express God’s “being” and his “glory” (Hebrews 1:3), and yet at the same time the Son does not seek his own glory, showing that in some meaningful sense his glory and God’s glory are not the same (John 8:54). Thus, one (the Son) is a “copy of” God, and the Son also ‘copies’ or follows the Father in everything he himself does or that he teaches to others.—John 5:19, 30, 36, 43; 7:16, 17; 8:28, 29, 38, 40; 12:49.

It is for these reasons that the Christian Witnesses of Jah and many Jehovah’s Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society believe that the Father has put his Son in the position of hearing and even responding to our prayers (John 14:13-14). But as I will show in this chapter, there is a difference concerning how we are taught to pray to “our Father in the heavens” (Matthew 6:9), and what it means to pray or appeal directly to God’s Son. According to the Bible, the Son does hear and respond to our prayers (John 14:13-14). Therefore, no Christian should feel uncomfortable addressing Jesus directly, either as Jesus taught in John 14:13-14 or as Stephen did according to Acts 7:59. However, at the same time Christians follow the model for praying that Jesus himself left for us, where our more formal prayers are directed to the Father.—Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4.²

² For more on the biblical teaching of praying and appealing to Jesus, see Appendix E on pages 583-586 of my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 2d ed. (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), the content of which will be revised and expanded upon in a forthcoming *Elihu Online Paper* available soon through Elihu Books (<http://www.elihubooks.com>).

What is important to note here at the start of this chapter is an important point I made in Chapter 2. Trinitarians, such as Bowman and Komoszewski, assume what is said about “God” in the Bible in any positive sense must be understood in relation to the Trinity. They also limit and define what is taught about anyone else who is called “a god” or “gods” in the Bible to what they believe is true in relation to Trinitarianism. So the assumptions of Trinitarianism effectively limit everything that can be understood about “G-god” in the Bible by making what is said subject to the “truths” of the Trinity. By this I do not mean to suggest Trinitarians do not attempt to use the Bible to justify their beliefs. Even Bowman and Komoszewski attempt to define “God” or “god” to some extent in relation to the Bible. But they do this in a very limited sense, and only in so far as it supports what they already believe is true in relation to the Trinity.

For example, Bowman and Komoszewski define what it means to be “God” but not in terms of what is *done by God*, for then they would have to accept the biblical teaching considered earlier, namely, that God has appointed someone (his most beloved Son) to hear and to respond to our prayers in some sense. Rather, Bowman and Komoszewski attempt to define what it means to be “G-god” by what is *done to God*, in this case, prayer. But if we consider those things that God himself does as a means of defining what it means to be “God,” then it is clear that being God according to the Bible includes the idea that he can appoint those who express only his will to hear and to respond to our prayers in a sense that is not restricted to the Father.—John 14:13-14.

If a person is truly interested in understanding terms like “deity, god, or God” according to how these words are used and understood in the Bible (that is, based on the actions done to or permitted by those called “God,” “deity,” or “a god”), then it is clear the “one God, the Father” can be our God and at the same time appoint his faithful Son to hear and to respond to us. Further, since the Bible does not teach Trinitarianism, the Bible’s use of the terms for “G-god” should not be made subject to its assumptions. While in the Bible there is no formal definition of the terms for “God,” “deity,” or “a god,” such terms are often modified by other words which denote power and position, or which suggest authority

to such an extent the one so described is understood as the ultimate and final *determiner* of what can and will happen.

For example, in the Bible you will find the descriptions “Most High God” (Genesis 14:18-20), “God Almighty” (Exodus 6:3), “God of armies” (Amos 4:13), “God of your salvation” (Isaiah 17:10), “God of judgment” (Isaiah 30:18), the “God of all the kingdoms of the earth” (Isaiah 37:16), the “God of truth” (Psalm 31:5), and even “God of the gods” (Psalm 136:2) used of Jah. All of these descriptions show his authority over all others, for he does not depend on anyone else for power, position, or for authority. More significant in this respect are the descriptions in the Bible concerning God’s sovereign will and the freedom he has to determine what can or what will occur.

As I will explain further in Chapter 7, Jah is the one who ultimately decides to what extent something may occur, and whether someone else (such as his Son or other sons) may decide any part of a particular matter. It is this authority to ultimately decide what can or will occur, whether on his own or by permitting others to decide, that makes Jah the Father the “one God” above, beyond, and differently than anyone else called “G-god” in the Bible. Consider what Jah himself says in this light, according to the NWT’s rendering of Isaiah 41:21-24 (with underlining added [all capitals are plural references in the NWT]):

“Bring YOUR controversial case forward,” says Jehovah.
 “Produce YOUR arguments,” says the King of Jacob.
 “Produce and tell to us the things that are going to happen.
 The first things—what they were—do tell, that we may apply
 our heart and know the future of them. Or cause us to hear
 even the things that are coming. Tell the things that are to
 come afterward, that we may know that YOU are gods. Yes,
 YOU ought to do good or do bad, that we may gaze about and
 see [it] at the same time. Look! YOU are something
 nonexistent, and YOUR achievement is nothing. A detestable
 thing is anyone that chooses YOU.

These “nonexistent” things cannot determine beforehand what will occur. In contrast, as I discussed in Chapter 1 (pages 115-123), Exodus 3:14 reveals Jah as the one who ‘will be’ what

he chooses to be. Further, according to Job 9:12 no one can “resist him” or say to him, “What are you doing?” Only Jah can permit others to act in ways that, though at times may be against his will, ultimately prove that his ways are righteous and that those who love him do so in spite of their sin and imperfection, as in the case of Job (Job 2:1-10). Because Jah is the final determiner of what can or will be done, he is also able to grant such authority to others so that they might act according to his will.—Compare John 5:22, 27; 12:13; 19:11.

It is this grant of power, position, and authority to act as Jah himself that Trinitarians like Bowman and Komoszewski fail to appreciate in a biblical context. Though in the OT Jah is the one who ‘examines the kidneys and the heart’ (Jeremiah 11:20), his Son also has this same power and God has given him “all authority” so that he can ‘give us individually according to our deeds’ (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 2:23). Jesus fully expressed Jah’s will and being to us because the Father “saw good” for all of his fullness to dwell in his Son (John 6:38; Colossians 1:19; Hebrews 1:3). But it is the Father who decides what can or will occur, and what things others will be permitted to decide. Those whom Jah allows to make decisions are then responsible for their choices.

To further illustrate this point about the Father’s supreme will, in the Bible the Father is the source of “all things” while the Son is one “through whom” the Father created (1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16). But being God’s agent does not change the fact that it was “because of your [the Father’s] will [creations] existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11). That this is a reference to the Father’s will is clear from the description of him as “the One seated on the throne,” who is distinguished from “the Lamb” who takes the scroll from him in Revelation 5:1-7. It is this “Lamb” who receives from the Father permission to sit with him on his throne, which the Lamb also then grants to those who ‘conquer’ in his name.—Revelation 3:21; compare Revelation 2:27.

While it is clear the Bible presents “God” as the final determiner and cause of all that has, can, or that will occur (even as one who can grant others the authority which would otherwise belong only to him), “God” is also used in the Bible in reference to

spirit, non-human existence. For example, in Ezekiel 28:2 Jah says the following words to the king of Tyre, “an earthling man is what you are, and not a god.” Here the word for “god” (Hebrew: *'el*) is clearly used in contrast to the word for “man” (Hebrew: *'adam*).

A similar contrast may also be intended in Jah's words to “the gods” of Psalm 82:1-7, where after referring to these “judges” as “gods” and even as “sons of the Most High,” Jah says to them: “Surely you will die just as men do; And like any one of the princes you will fall!” Though there is some question here about to whom these references apply (see Chapter 2, pages 194-204), a contrast does appear to be made here between the “gods” and those “men” like whom the “gods” will be when they, too, “die” because of their unrighteousness.

The account involving Manoah, his wife, and “Jehovah's angel” (see Chapter 2, pages 195-196) also shows that “G-god” can refer to spirits who are above mankind, but without any explicit authority given to them by Jah to determine what will occur. Indeed, in Judges 13:22 Manoah associates the majestic term “God” or “a god” (Hebrew: *'elohim*) with what he ‘saw,’ namely, “the flame ascended from off the altar heavenward” and ‘Jehovah's angel ascend in the flame’ (verse 20). Finally, in Hosea 11:9 we have Jah's words, “I am God and not man.” Again we see the contrast between that which is “God” (Hebrew: *'el*) and that which is “man” (Hebrew: *'ish*). To be “God” in this sense in contrast to what it means to be “man” is explained further in Isaiah 31:3: “The Egyptians, though, are earthling men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit.” Here “God” (Hebrew: *'el*) is contrasted with “man” (Hebrew: *'adam*) as “flesh” (Hebrew: *basar*) is contrasted with “spirit” (Hebrew: *ruach*).

In the Bible, the Father is the source of all things and the final determiner of all that can or will occur (see Chapter 7). At the same time, the Father has myriads of heavenly “S/sons” who are also “gods” both in their representation of the Father and because they, like him, are ‘spirit and not flesh.’ When the Father's spirit S/sons represent him in these ways, they may and in fact *do* act as if they are the “one God,” even as Jah God himself (Exodus 4:16; 7:1-2; Acts 7:30, 35; compare Exodus 3:2, 4, 6). Divine representation of

this kind does not in any way take away from the glory which belongs to Jah, the one represented. In fact, it furthers his glory because those S/sons who so act as “God,” or even as Jah himself, can truly do so only if they uphold the “one God’s” sovereign will rather than their own. The reason why they surrender themselves completely to Jah’s will is obvious: They recognize and accept that Jah’s ways are best. By representing him and not themselves, they glorify him as the “one God.”

Trinitarians have failed to highlight the glory that the “sons of God” have given their Father by representing and, indeed, by *being* their Father, the “one God,” to us. By this I do not mean that Trinitarians have failed to glorify these “sons.” That is not what this is about. Rather, their failure is in not recognizing the glory these “sons of God” have shown to God (compare Psalm 138:1) by expressing their Father’s Godship instead of their own will. This is in contrast to other “gods” mentioned in the Bible who at one time belonged to heaven.

For example, though Satan was already a “god” in the sense of being ‘spirit and not flesh,’ he opposed Jah’s will and became the “God of this age” because of the authority he was given (2 Corinthians 4:4). As Satan told Jesus, “it [the authority and the glory of the kingdoms of the earth] has been delivered to me, and to whomever I wish I give it.”—Luke 4:6.

This brings us to the question of how the Bible presents Jesus as “God” and as “a god.” It is an important distinction and an essential teaching for anyone desiring to follow him as “Lord” and “God” without compromising the biblical teaching of “one God, the Father” (John 20:28; 1 Corinthians 8:6). The NT clearly teaches that Jesus has been given authority, that he has been exalted “to the glory of God the Father,” and that Jesus perfectly expresses and represents the will of the “one God,” not his own will (Matthew 28:18; John 6:38; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3). In the Bible, Jesus is not only a ‘son of God’ but *the* “Son of God” in a unique sense not elsewhere attributed to God’s other “sons.”—Proverbs 30:4; Mark 3:11; John 1:34; Hebrews 1:2.

In the balance of this chapter I will explain how Jesus’ divinity does not contradict but rather reinforces and supports the belief in “one God, the Father.” I will also further defend the beliefs of

Jehovah's Witnesses where these relate to Jesus' divinity as taught in three NT texts in the Gospel of John (1:1; 1:18; 20:28). I have chosen these three texts for further discussion of this subject because they each call Jesus "G-god," and they do so with the least amount of ambiguity in terms of whether the Greek word for "G-god" (*theos*) is actually applied to Jesus.

John 1:1: Jesus as "a god"

Jesus as "the Word." In Chapter 3 I presented reasons for believing Jesus of Nazareth preexisted his human birth as a divine being "in the form of God/a god" (Philippians 2:6). In John 1:1 reference is made to "the Word" (Greek: *ho logos*) as a being who was "with God" in "the beginning." This Word was used "by" (Greek: *dia*) God to make "all things." The Word is also referred to in John 1:1c as *theos*, the Greek word for "God" or "a god."

The reason why *logos* is often translated "Word" (with a capital "W" indicating a proper name) is because the same apostle who wrote John 1:1 also received "a revelation by Jesus Christ, which God gave to him" (Revelation 1:1). In this "revelation" John is told that the resurrected Jesus has *a name* "that no one knows but he himself." This *name* is "the Word [Greek: *ho logos*] of God" (Revelation 19:12-13). Since John did not know this was a "name" for Jesus *before* it was revealed to him, he could not have written John 1:1 prior to receiving this revelation. In John 1:1 we see John using the "name" of "the Word" for Jesus *before* he was "Jesus of Nazareth," before he came to earth, when he was "in the beginning with God." So "the Word" is clearly the "name" of a preexistent being.

However, as noted in Chapter 3 (pages 213-230) some believe Jesus did not preexist his human birth as a real person. When it comes to John 1:1 and the presentation of "the Word" as "in the beginning with God," the real preexistence of Jesus of Nazareth is denied by writers like Greg Deuble, who claims that John "is not referring to a personally preexisting Son of God" by

his use of *ho logos* in John 1:1.³ Deuble follows Buzzard (see Chapter 3, page 220) in identifying *ho logos* in John 1:1 as God’s “plan,” even his “master plan” or “dream.”⁴ This “plan” has “divine power,” according to Deuble, and it is therefore similar to the spoken “word” by which Jah created according to Psalm 33:6, 9, and to God’s “will” by which he also created according to Revelation 4:11.⁵

Deuble does not accept *ho logos* in John 1:1 as a “name,” such as “the Word,” though that is exactly what John says it is in Revelation 19:13! Consider this text now, together with verses 11 and 12 (NWT):

And I saw the heaven opened, and, look! a white horse. And the one seated upon it is called Faithful and True, and he judges and carries on war in righteousness. His eyes are a fiery flame, and upon his head are many diadems. He has a name written that no one knows but he himself, and he is arrayed with an outer garment sprinkled with blood, and the name he is called is The Word of God.

According to Deuble: “On one occasion Jesus is given the name ‘the Word of God’ and this is in Revelation 19:13. This name has been given to him after his resurrection and ascension, but we will search in vain to find it before his birth.” Yet, that is precisely what we have in John 1:1! *Before* Jesus’ birth, when he was “in the beginning with God,” and before he “became flesh” (John 1:14), he is called *ho logos*. This is the first part of the “name” given to him in Revelation 19:13.

Since all interested parties agree that in Revelation 19:13 *ho logos* is in fact a name for Jesus, a name that before he received it ‘no one knew but he [Jesus] himself,’ then we should accept that Jesus is the same person as the preexistent “Word” in John 1:1, because John used it for the “Word” who was “with God” and who was a “divine being” or “a god,” meaning one of God’s divine “S/sons.”—John 1:1; 10:30-37.

³ Greg S. Deuble, *They Never Told Me This in Church! A Call to Read the Bible with New Eyes* (Atlanta, GA: Restoration Fellowship, 2006), page 180.

⁴ Deuble, *They Never Told Me This in Church!* page 180.

⁵ Deuble, *They Never Told Me This in Church!* page 180.

The Logos in other early literature and thought. The use of *ho logos* as a “name” for Jesus in the NT is not its only use in ancient Jewish or in Greek literature. Since there are other early Jewish and Greek uses of *ho logos*, I will consider some of them here so that we can better understand why Jesus may have been given the “name” *ho logos* in the NT.

It seems that Heraclitus (a philosopher who was born around 550 BCE and who sought to explain the universe) was the first to use the term *logos* in reference to “an underlying cosmic principle of order.”⁶ For Heraclitus, the term also meant *discourse, teaching, word, reputation, relation, proportion, meaning, and truth*. Heraclitus, therefore, viewed the *logos* in an impersonal sense. But this view is not consistent with the biblical use of *ho logos* for Jesus, as noted previously. According to G. Fries, “Heraclitus has the whole field of meaning in mind in each individual use of the word.”⁷ Therefore, it is not always easy to understand or to define Heraclitus’ use of *logos* each time he uses it.

Plato’s concept of *logos* differs from that of Heraclitus in that, for Plato, *logos* has more to do with “rational explanation” than it does a cosmic principle ordering the material world.⁸ Because he connected *logos* with rational thought, Plato believed that “man alone of living beings has *logos*” since “his actions are determined by the word, and he himself is capable of speech and understanding.”⁹

Aristotle also used *logos* in reference to rational speech. Speech and reason (both identified by Aristotle as *logos*) were the distinguishing factors between humans and the lower animals.¹⁰ This distinguishing factor (human rationality) is something “beyond the realm of the material” for both Plato and for Aristotle, though the same cannot be said of the Stoic *logos*.

⁶ Thomas H. Tobin, “LOGOS,” ABD 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), page 348. See also, R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), page 24; H. Kleinknecht, “λόγος,” TDNT 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pages 80-81; G. Fries, “λόγος,” NIDNTT 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), page 1081.

⁷ Fries, “λόγος,” page 1081.

⁸ Tobin, “LOGOS,” page 348.

⁹ Fries, “λόγος,” page 1083.

¹⁰ Tobin, “LOGOS,” page 348; see also Kleinknecht, “λόγος,” page 84, e.

In Stoicism the *logos* was viewed as the creative power which “extends throughout matter,”¹¹ working in all things. Indeed, it gives life and animation to non-living things.¹² There is a great, general *logos* from which all power proceeds and to which it all eventually returns. The Stoic *logos* is both a “rational power of order and a vital power of conception.”¹³ Bultmann is correct when he writes that no connection exists between the Stoic concept of *logos* and the Johannine use of the term, aside from the fact that “both are of fundamental significance for the world.” Bultmann also rightly points out that “the understanding of the world is so totally different in each case.”¹⁴

However, in the “mystery religions” and in the Hermetic view of the *logos* there are some interesting similarities with the Johannine view of *ho logos*. For example, founders of various mystery cults combined their “revelations” with Greek thought which in some circles led to the idea that Isis created Osiris as the *logos* who then “ordered and made manifest the material world.”¹⁵ Hermeticism’s “concept [of ‘*logos*’] is hypostatized [= made into a real person] as a god, or identified with a god.”¹⁶

Ultimately, however, there is little resemblance between Jesus as *ho logos* and the Hellenistic views of *logos* considered above. But there is no doubt that, based on the different Hellenistic views of *logos*, the use of this term as “a name” for a Jewish Messiah would have attracted the attention of many who embraced any view of *logos* during that same time. There were even some Jews who made use of Greek philosophy and OT theology together with *logos* when it came to beliefs about intermediary agents and the manifestation of God.

For example, Philo of Alexandria (who likely lived and wrote during the first century CE) used the term *logos* in relation to the

¹¹ Kleinknecht, “λόγος,” page 85.

¹² This is similar to the Neo-platonic view of the *logos*, though the two views are not entirely identical. See Kleinknecht, “λόγος,” pages 85-86.

¹³ Kleinknecht, “λόγος,” page 85. Fries, “λόγος,” page 1084, refers to the Stoic *logos* as “the constitutive principle of the cosmos, which extends right through matter.”

¹⁴ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, page 24.

¹⁵ Tobin, “LOGOS,” page 349; Kleinknecht, “λόγος,” page 86; Fries, “λόγος,” page 1085.

¹⁶ Kleinknecht, “λόγος,” page 87.

OT LXX. Philo's view of the *logos* was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, though his understanding of the *logos* is presented differently by those who study his writings. Some scholars believe that Philo's *logos* was a property of God (his mind or his essence), which then became the place (within God) for attracting pertinent properties of God together with his ideas, which then (eventually) become external to him.¹⁷

Then we have scholars like Demetrius Trakatellis, who believes that Philo presents the *logos* as an agent or intermediary for God.¹⁸ In support of this latter view, Philo identifies the *logos* with the glory of God that came upon Mount Sinai when God spoke to Moses.¹⁹ Philo argues that God did not actually leave his place; rather, he projected some of his glory by means of a suitable agent to represent him. According to Alan Segal:

Philo's concept of the *logos* is a combination of divine intermediation and the Stoic world spirit. *Logos* is equivalent with the intelligible world; but because it can be hypostasized [that is, it can become an individual being], the *logos* can be viewed as a separate agent and called a god.²⁰

When we consider the totality of Philo's teaching concerning the *logos*, it is easy to see how he might simply have conceived of the *logos* as a manifestation of God, not as an actual "second god" (see his *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 2.62; compare *On Dreams* 1.238-240). Still, there is also something to be said for the belief that Philo actually viewed the *logos* as a being distinct from God, as "an archangel" and as an intermediary between God and creation, even as God's "Firstborn."²¹ Andrew Chester puts the difficulties associated with obtaining a consistent interpretation of Philo's *logos* in perspective:

¹⁷ H.A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy*, vol. 1, 2d. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), pages 229-233.

¹⁸ Demetrius C. Trakatellis, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in the Writings of Justin Martyr* (Missoula, Mt.: Scholars Press, 1976), page 76.

¹⁹ See Philo's *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, Book 2, 37-39.

²⁰ A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), page 23.

²¹ *On the Confusion of Tongues* 146; *Who is the Heir* 205-206; *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 2.94; *On the Unchangeableness of God* 138; *On the Cherubim* 36.

It is notoriously difficult, however, to know precisely how to evaluate Philo’s language and ideas here, as throughout his works. Thus, for example, it is not always clear that his use of [*logos*] is meant to represent the ‘Logos,’ as a technical term. Equally problematic is the fact that since Philo’s ‘system’ is so conflate and his works are so voluminous, it is not possible to establish a single, consistent philosophy; this is scarcely surprising since, as we have already noted, Philo fuses together various concepts drawn from different philosophical and biblical traditions, but it poses obvious problems for the interpretation both of individual passages and of his thought as a whole. It can, however, be said that clearly for Philo the Logos is not identical with God, and in some sense at least is obviously subordinate to him.²²

Other Jewish groups around this time followed what is called *memra* (Aramaic for “word”) theology. Contrary to Philo’s partial understanding of the *logos*, according to C.T.R. Hayward adherents of this theology did not believe the “word” (*memra*) was a kind of intermediary, nor was it used as a replacement for the divine name.²³ Rather, Hayward believes *memra* was “a means of speaking about His [God’s] presence with His people in the past and in the future, in creation and in history.”²⁴ However, the Targumic personification of *memra* might suggest an intermediary figure of some kind.

For example, R.E. Brown refers to the Targum Onkelos where in Exodus 3:12 instead of God saying (as he does in the Bible), “I will be with you,” the Targum reads, “My *Memra* will be your support.” Brown nevertheless believes (as does Hayward) “this is not personification, but the use of *Memra* serves as a buffer for divine transcendence.” Brown also writes that any connection between *memra* and the Prologue’s use of *logos* relates to the

²² Andrew Chester, “Jewish Messianic Expectations and Mediatorial Figures and Pauline Christology,” page 50, in *Paulus und das antike Judentum*, eds., Martin Hengel and Ulrich Heckel (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991).

²³ C.T.R. Hayward, “The Holy Name of the God of Moses and the Prologue of St John’s Gospel,” *NTS* 25 (1979), pages 16, 19, 23.

²⁴ Hayward, “The Holy Name of the God of Moses and the Prologue of St John’s Gospel,” page 23.

Christian belief that Jesus “pre-eminently incorporated God’s presence among men.”²⁵

However, Joseph Fitzmeyer has raised the question of whether *memra* was personified or used as a buffer for Jah only in the later Targumic tradition. Fitzmeyer refers to the Qumran Targum of Job (11QtgJob) where there are no examples of a “buffer usage” for *memra*, which usage we find in the later “Second Targum of Job.” So Fitzmeyer concludes, “It seems to me that Qumran evidence puts the burden of proof on those who would maintain an early date for the buffer or personified usage of [*memra*] in the discussion of the Johannine [*logos*].”²⁶ This should sound familiar in comparison to the “burden of proof” that is on Trinitarians who maintain (by their usage relative to *theos* in the NT) an early date for their use of “person” and for their uses of “God.”—See Chapter 2, pages 131-140.

The most likely background to the revelation of “the Word” as the “name” of a preexistent being in the NT, is the figure of “Wisdom” in the OT. Brown rightly notes that “in the OT presentation of Wisdom, there are good parallels for almost every detail of the Prologue’s description of the Word.”²⁷ E.J. Epp singles out several Wisdom hymns which he believes influenced John’s view of Jesus as the Logos both “in content and in form.”²⁸ While these hymns may not have influenced the actual “revelation” to John of the “name” *ho logos* for Jesus (Revelation 19:13), John’s subsequent presentation and discussion of *ho logos* in his Gospel is certainly consistent with what we read about “Wisdom” in biblical and in related literature.

Epp refers to parts of Proverbs 8:22-35, Sirach 24:3-9, 23-32, Baruch 3:9-4:2, and Wisdom of Solomon (Wisdom) 7:21-9:18 as good reasons supporting his view. Below I have reproduced several comparative points referred to by Epp that I also believe parallel

²⁵ R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (i-xii)*, (AB 29; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), Appendix II, page 524.

²⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pages 94-95.

²⁷ Fitzmeyer, *The Semitic Background of the New Testament*, page 523.

²⁸ E.J. Epp, “Wisdom, Torah, Word: The Johannine Prologue and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), page 130.

descriptions of the Logos in the Johannine Prologue. I have checked all of his references and I have omitted those that do not, to me, seem to have any connection between the Johannine *logos* and the “Wisdom” in Epp’s references. I have also added my own observations and reorganized the categories according to what I believe are the clearest parallels:

Figure 4.1

Parallels Between the Johannine Logos and Wisdom Traditions

PARALLELS	BIBLICAL TEXTS	NON-BIBLICAL TEXTS
1) They both preexisted the earth.	Joh 1:1-3. Compare: Prov 8:22-31.	Sirach 24:9; Wisdom 7:21; 8:5-6; 9:1-2, 9
2) They both have a special relationship with God.	Joh 1:1, 2, 18. Compare: Prov 8:27-30.	Wisdom 8:3; 9:4, 9-10
3) They were both with Jah during creation.	Joh 1:3, 10. Compare: Prov 8:27-30.	Wisdom 7:22; 8:4-6; 9:1-4 ²⁹
4) They are both associated with light, life, truth, and salvation.	Joh 1:4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17. Compare: Prov 8:6-8 (truth), 35 (life).	Sirach 24:32 (light); Wisdom 7:10, 26, 29 (light); 8:13, 17 (life); 9:18 (salvation)
5) They both appear in the world and associate with mankind.	Joh 1:9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16 18. Compare: Prov 8:31.	Sirach 1:15; 24:8, 10-12; Wisdom 9:10, 17-18; Baruch 3:12; and 1 Enoch 42:2 ³⁰
6) They are both characterized by God’s glory.	Joh 1:14 (compare 17:5)	Wisdom 7:25-26. Compare Heb 1:3; 9:10-11. ³¹

In his presentation of Wisdom parallels to John’s Prologue, Epp also lists parallel thoughts that are found in Jewish literature

²⁹ Wisdom 9:1 refers to God who “made all things by means of [his] word [*logos*].” But then Wisdom 9:2 uses *sophia* (“wisdom”) as a parallel to *logos*. Also, in Sirach 24:3 Wisdom says, “I came out of the mouth of the Most High.” This shows the close correspondence between Wisdom and God’s “word,” which is highlighted by the imagery associated with ‘coming out of the mouth of the Most High.’

³⁰ 1 Enoch 42:2 says Wisdom attempts to “make her dwelling among the children of men,” but after finding “no dwelling” she returns to be “among the angels.”

³¹ Brenton translates the last part of Wisdom 9:11 as “preserve me in her power,” when it should be translated “protect me in her *glory* [τῇ δόξῃ αὐτῆς, *te doxe autes*].” For a further discussion of Jesus as “Wisdom,” see my article, “Jah Loves Her, Wisdom, His Son, the Word,” *Watching the Ministry* (October 18, 2010).

concerning the Torah ("Law"), which at times was equated with Wisdom in pre-Rabbinic literature (compare Baruch 4:1; Sirach 24:23; 4 Maccabees 1:17; 2 Baruch 38:2-4; 77:16). According to Epp, "Torah comes naturally to mind in a Wisdom hymn context." After showing the close connection between grace, truth and God's Law, Epp points to the Prologue's reference to the "grace and truth" (verse 17) that comes through Jesus as evidence that the "Torah has been displaced—superseded by Jesus Christ!"³²

In the OT, God's "word" (Hebrew: *davar*) is personified and perhaps even hypostatized (again, considered as a separate, truly existing being). For example, God's "word" is 'sent' to heal (Psalm 107:20) and to accomplish God's will (Isaiah 55:11). Similarly, the apocryphal work Wisdom of Solomon (18:15) also presents a hypostatized *logos*, one who is portrayed as a warrior coming forth from God's throne. Additionally, 4 Ezra 6:38 speaks of the "word" which "accomplishes [God's] work." So the use of *ho logos* as the revealed "name" for Jesus would no doubt have resulted in all kinds of associations concerning his identity, particularly as it related to existing concepts for Wisdom, Torah, *Memra*, and the *logos* in Hellenistic and in Jewish thought, and to *davar* in the OT [translated in the LXX by *logos* and by *rema*]).

It is likely John and Jesus' other early followers used the existing concepts associated with *ho logos* and Wisdom in order to advance the revealed truth about the one who is the reality behind all of the speculation. For this one, the Word, existed "in the beginning with God" and became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1, 14). But in addition to being "with God" and becoming a man," how should we understand the Word as *theos* according John 1:1c?

The Logos as "God," "a god," and "divine." We come now to the translation and the understanding of a key term used to

³² Epp, "Wisdom, Torah, Word," page 139. Compare Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (i-xii), page 523, who writes, "John 1:17, with its contrast between the Law and Jesus Christ, may indicate that, in part, the Johannine doctrine of the Word was formulated as a Christian answer to Jewish speculation on the Law." Whether it was "formulated" or *revealed* to him, John's first explicit use of *ho logos* for Jesus is with it used as a "name."—Rev 19:13.

describe the Word in John 1:1, namely, the Greek word for “God” or “a god,” *theos*. When answering the question of how this word should be translated when it is predicated of “the Word” (as in *theos en ho logos* [1:1c.]), it was for a long time rather common for supporters of the translation “the Word was God” to cite an article written in 1933 by Trinitarian scholar E.C. Colwell.³³ Trinitarian writer Dr. Walter Martin, for example, wrote (with underlining added), “Colwell’s rule clearly states that a definite predicate nominative (*Theos*—God) never takes an article when it precedes the verb (*was*) as in John 1:1.”³⁴ But the “rule” to which Martin refers is actually stated by Colwell as follows, “Definite

³³ E.C. Colwell, “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament,” *JBL* 52 (1933), pages 12-21.

³⁴ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1977), page 75. On the same page Martin also wrote, “There can be no direct object following *was* since according to grammatical usage intransitive verbs take no objects but take instead predicate nominatives which refer back to the subject, in this case, *Word (Logos)*.” It remains a mystery to this day just who, if anyone, claimed ‘there is a direct object following was.’ But Martin is not the only one who misused Colwell’s rule. Even eminent Greek scholar Bruce M. Metzger was misled and then he proceeded to confuse and mislead others in his article, “The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Jesus Christ,” *Theology Today* 10.1 (April 1953), when on page 75 he wrote (with underlining added) that “a god” in NWT is a “frightful mistranslation” and that it “overlooks entirely an established rule of Greek grammar which necessitates the rendering, ‘... and the Word was God.’” The “established rule” which allegedly “necessitates” the translation “the Word was God” is none other than Colwell’s “rule,” as shown in the footnote to Metzger’s comment in his article. The most incredible statement made in connection with Colwell’s rule or, rather, with Metzger’s misuse of it, is by William Barclay in his article, “An Ancient Heresy in Modern Dress,” *ExpT* 65 (October 1957), page 32. After referring to Metzger’s article Barclay asserts that the NWT rendering of Joh 1:1 is “grammatically impossible”! There are many other examples, unfortunately, that could be cited where Trinitarian scholars have misunderstood and/or misused Colwell’s rule. David Alan Black’s statement is a classic example, “Colwell’s rule states that anarthrous predicate nominatives that precede the copula are usually definite in meaning” (*Learn to Read New Testament Greek* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993], page 182). See also Robert Countess, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New Testament: A Critical Analysis of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, 2d ed. (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982), pages 48-56; C. Kuehne, “The Greek Article and the Doctrine of Christ’s Deity,” *Journal of Theology* 15.2 (June, 1975), pages 9-22; Ed Miller, “The *Logos* was God,” *EQ* 53 (1981), pages 65-77; Richard Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman, 1994), page 66; and Gerald Stevens, *New Testament Greek* (New York: University Press of America, 1994), page 77, note 7.

predicate nouns which precede the verb usually lack the article.”³⁵ Martin's misquotation and misrepresentation of what Colwell wrote continues to this day in reprinted editions of Martin's *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

The reason Colwell's work has so often been cited in defense of the translation “the Word was God” is because of what Colwell stated on page 21 of his article: “Loosely speaking, this study may be said to have increased the definiteness of a predicate noun before the verb without the article, and to have decreased the definiteness of a predicate noun after the verb without the article” (underlining added). Because Trinitarians have long favored the translation “the Word was God” (which was also viewed as a definite translation of *theos*), Colwell's study was and to some extent still is welcomed uncritically by Trinitarians.³⁶ But some Trinitarians (including Bowman) have recognized “a logical blunder” in Colwell's conclusion. In spite of this, Bowman still believes “Colwell is *not* necessarily saying that an anarthrous predicate noun is most likely, as a matter of statistical measure, to be definite if it precedes the verb.”³⁷ Yet, that is precisely what Colwell *is* saying!

Though one could speculate about just what Colwell meant by “loosely speaking,” Bowman's statement clearly does not represent what Colwell had in mind. In fact, right after Colwell says his rule may “loosely speaking” have increased the definiteness of an anarthrous predicate noun preceding the verb

³⁵ Colwell, “A Definite Rule,” page 20 (underlining added). On page 18, note 14, Colwell himself lists 15 exceptions to his rule! Martin ignored every one of them.

³⁶ One of the more recent uses of Colwell's article that I have found by a Trinitarian writing against Jehovah's Witnesses and against the NWT of Joh 1:1 is in Paul Wegner's *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), page 364.

³⁷ Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), page 68. Bowman believes a “fair understanding” of Colwell's article is to understand him as “simply saying that we should be more readily prepared to acknowledge as definite those anarthrous predicate nouns that precede the verb where context does not demand them to be construed as indefinite” (*Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 68). I argue that what Bowman here writes is *not* a fair reading of Colwell's article, because Colwell saw far more than this in his rule. But even if Bowman is correct in his understanding of what Colwell believed about his study, such an understanding does not follow from what Colwell actually wrote.

(and to have decreased the “definiteness of a predicate noun after the verb without the article”), Colwell reveals that he did in fact, contrary to Bowman’s claim, believe that an anarthrous predicate noun is most likely definite if it precedes the verb. Consider Colwell’s own words:

The opening verse of John’s Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun. Καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος looks much more like “And the Word was God” than “And the Word was divine” when viewed with reference to this rule.³⁸

Colwell here claims the very thing that Bowman says he does not claim! Colwell uses a “rule” that when properly understood (as stated by Colwell) merely asserts the probability of articularity (that is, whether the Greek noun has the article) of definite predicate nouns that precede and that follow the verb (see below) as a means of determining whether the noun itself is definite. Indeed, Colwell claims that John 1:1c “looks much more like” a definite noun (such as “God”) “*when viewed with reference to this rule*”!

Bowman, like many other Trinitarians but in a different way, has misrepresented what Colwell wrote. Indeed, Colwell himself misused his own rule! Even Bowman acknowledges, “Colwell’s application of this conclusion to John 1:1, however, does appear to go beyond the evidence of his own study.”³⁹ Colwell’s application of his rule to John 1:1c does not simply “appear to go beyond the evidence of his own study”; that is *precisely* what it does! In addition to Colwell’s own comments concerning John 1:1 (cited above), Daniel Wallace writes that Colwell told one of his students, Harry Sturz (who later became Wallace’s first Greek professor), that Colwell believed his rule suggested anarthrous predicate nouns preceding the verb would normally be definite.⁴⁰

³⁸ Colwell, “A Definite Rule,” page 21 (underlining added).

³⁹ Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 68.

⁴⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), page 259.

The precise reasons why Colwell's belief about his own rule is not accurate were first explained by Paul Dixon:

The only other conceivable value of Colwell's rule [that is, other than for textual criticism] is to say it is possible to have an anarthrous predicate nominative preceding the verb that is definite (but, did we not already know that?), and that because Colwell apparently found some. Yet, it is most important to see that the rule says nothing about the probability of definiteness (contrary to what Colwell and Blum would have us believe), nor can it, as Colwell has not considered both definite and non-definite nouns. Because Colwell considered only definite predicate nominatives then his rule applies only when definiteness has already been determined, then, the probability of articularity may be ascertained. ... Assuming the rule is valid, its value is almost exclusively for textual criticism. The rule may not be valid, however, as its underlying assumptions are highly questionable.⁴¹

Ironically, what happens here with regard to Colwell's rule as described by Dixon is also essentially what happens with each Trinitarian assumption: A determination (belief) is made or accepted first, and *then* a rule or principle (whether it is Colwell's rule or a principle of usage for terms such as "G-god" or "person") is created in order to prove or support what has already been accepted as true. Though Bowman cites Dixon's thesis in his book and agrees that "Colwell's rule cannot determine the correct translation of John 1:1," Bowman still argues that it is "not legitimate to dismiss Colwell's rule, as some otherwise knowledgeable JW's have done."⁴²

The only apparent value in Colwell's article is to show anarthrous predicate nominatives which precede the verb, and

⁴¹ Paul S. Dixon, "The Significance of the Anarthrous Predicate Nominative in John" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975), pages 18, 23 (underline added). Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, page 262, says that Dixon's thesis "demonstrates that the anarthrous preverbal PN [predicate nominative] is still *closer* to definiteness than is the anarthrous *post*-copulative predicate nominative." I see nothing in Dixon's thesis that would indicate such thinking on Dixon's part or that leads to any such conclusion.

⁴² Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 69.

which are *already considered definite*,⁴³ at times lack the article. Colwell’s article does nothing to *determine* definiteness, as Dixon correctly observed.⁴⁴ In 1973 Philip Harner wrote an article that brought another grammatical view to the use of the noun *theos* in John 1:1c, a view that while it is not new in terms of what it ultimately means for Trinitarians’ understanding of Jesus as *theos*, it was new relative to Colwell’s rule in terms of how it better gets to or supports a Trinitarian understanding of John 1:1.

In his article Harner suggests, unlike Colwell, that “anarthrous predicate nouns preceding the verb [such as *theos* in John 1:1c] may function primarily to express the nature or character of the subject.”⁴⁵ While Colwell and other Trinitarians since him have tried to show that grammatically *theos* in John 1:1c is a definite noun (“God”), as noted above Harner and other Trinitarians have put forth another way to understand *theos* that involves the placement of a noun (like *theos*) that is without the Greek article, and that is in a certain word order (syntax) relative to the verb used. In the case of the syntax of John 1:1c, this involves a form of the Greek verb “to be” (namely, “was”). This newer understanding of *theos* has led to more Trinitarians openly emphasizing the qualities or nature of what it means to be *theos* (“G-god”), rather than dealing more so with the Word’s definite identity as “God” or as “a god,” biblically, by being one of God’s “S/sons.”

As I explained in Chapter 2, for Trinitarians “what it means to be *theos*” has to do with understanding the use of *theos* for any “person” of the Trinity to involve each one’s sharing fully and

⁴³ Whether Colwell’s examples should be considered definite nouns is also questionable. See, Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), page 184; and D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), pages 86-87. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, page 87, writes that “it is a fallacy to argue, on the basis of the fact that a predicate noun preceding a copulative verb is anarthrous, that it is highly likely to be definite.” Carson also concludes, “Statistically this is no more likely than the conclusion it is *indefinite*.” Dixon’s study shows that of the 53 pre-verbal PN constructions in John he did not consider one of them indefinite (Dixon, “Significance,” page 32). But that does *not* mean Dixon is against using the English indefinite article(s) in translating those nouns he considered to be “qualitative,” which I will discuss further below.

⁴⁴ Dixon, “Significance,” page 55.

⁴⁵ P.B. Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” *JBL* 92 (1973), page 75.

equally in the nature of the Trinity, their “one God.” No one “person” of the Trinity is this “one God,” and yet we have throughout the Bible instances where the Father and to some extent his “S/sons” are referred to as “God” or as “a god.” However, the Father alone is described as the “one God.”—1 Corinthians 8:6.

Ultimately, what this means is that whether a Trinitarian tries to use Colwell's rule to argue that *theos* in John 1:1c. is definite or use Harner's study to argue that *theos* really only ‘expresses the nature or character of the subject,’ no matter what grammatical label a Trinitarian gives to *theos* in John 1:1c., or to *theos* anywhere else, it cannot identify Jesus definitively as the Trinity but only as a “person” of the Trinity.

In other words, Trinitarianism is assumed by Trinitarians in their interpretation of John 1:1 no matter what kind of noun *theos* is in 1:1c or even in John 1:1b (“the Word was with God”), or anywhere else in the NT for that matter when *theos* is used of Jesus or of the Father (see Chapter 2, in particular pages 141-154). Even though Harner is arguing for a Trinitarian understanding of John 1:1, Jehovah's Witnesses have cited Harner's article several times in various publications when defending the NWT rendering “a god” in John 1:1c. For example, Harner's article is cited in the 1984 Reference Edition of the NWT as follows:

In his article “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” ... p. 85, Philip B. Harner said that such clauses as the one in Joh 1:1, “with an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb, are primarily qualitative in meaning. They indicate that the *logos* has the nature of *theos*. There is no basis for regarding the predicate *theos* as definite. On p. 87 of his article, Harner concluded: “In John 1:1 I think that the qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun cannot be regarded as definite.”⁴⁶

It is critical to understand exactly why Harner's analysis is cited here in the NWT in support of its translation of John 1:1. The above quote from the NWT Reference Bible makes it is clear Harner did not regard a definite translation of *theos* in John 1:1c (=

⁴⁶ Appendix 6A, page 1579 (underlining added).

“the Word was God”) as correct. Harner understands the noun *theos*, in reference to the Logos, as “qualitative.” What, though, does Harner mean by “qualitative”? Before I answer this question, let me explain what Harner means by and why he objects to viewing *theos* as a definite noun in John 1:1c. In what follows I will underline two extremely important comments Harner makes in connection with his understanding of the grammar of John 1:1c:

Commentators on the Fourth Gospel, as far as I know, have not specifically approached the meaning of this clause from the standpoint of the qualitative force of *theos* as an anarthrous predicate preceding the verb. In many cases their interpretations agree with the explanation that is given above. But consideration of the qualitative meaning of *theos* would lend further clarification and support to their understanding of the clause. J.H. Bernard, for example, points out that Codex L reads *ho theos* instead of *theos*. “But this,” he continues, “would contradict the preceding clause.” In a similar way W.F. Howard writes that *theos* and *ho logos* are not interchangeable. Otherwise, he continues, “the writer could not say ‘the Word was with God.’” Both writers, in effect, are arguing that the predicate *theos* cannot be regarded as definite in this clause. In terms of our analysis above this would mean that clause B should not be assimilated to clause A.⁴⁷

What Harner means when he says, “clause B should not be assimilated to clause A”⁴⁸ is that we should not understand John’s use of *theos* in reference to the Word as interchangeable with that of τὸν θεόν (*ton theon*; hereafter referenced in the Greek nominative case *ho theos*) in John 1:1b, the “God” “with” whom the Word existed. Otherwise, to use Harner’s words, “There would be no *ho theos* which is not also *ho logos*.”⁴⁹ This would, according to Harner, contradict the preceding clause where John states that the Word was “with God” (*ho theos*).⁵⁰ Yet, this type of confusion

⁴⁷ Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” page 85.

⁴⁸ The clauses he refers to here are the different ways John could have written John 1:1c, which are listed on page 84 of Harner’s article.

⁴⁹ Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” page 85.

⁵⁰ Deuble, *They Never Told Me This in Church!* pages 178-179, offers a rather remarkable understanding of “with” in John 1:1 when he writes:

There is good evidence in the Hebrew Scriptures that the prepositions “with” (*im* and *et*) often describe the relationship between a person and what is in his heart or mind. We have common expression in English when we say, “What’s *with* him?” or “What’s the matter *with* her?” Something is going on *inside* somebody.

Deuble then cites seventeen examples from the OT that he believes illustrate his point. But not one of the texts he cites uses the Greek preposition *pros* with an accusative to describe the kind of relationship Deuble sees between the Word and God in Joh 1:1, while at the same time providing similar, extended personal descriptions such as we find in John’s Prologue and in Rev 19:13 about Jesus as “the Word.” Indeed, in Num 14:24 we find the Greek preposition *en* used with the dative case (ἐν αὐτῷ, “in him”). In 1Ki 11:11 (3Ki 11:11 [LXX]) the Greek is *meta sou* (“with you”) where it involves that which occurred in connection with Solomon, but when person-to-person action is expressed (“The Lord said *to* Solomon”) we find *pros*! In 1Ch 28:12 we again find, not *pros*, but *en* (“in”) with a dative object. In Job 10:13 we again find *en* with a dative, not *pros* with an accusative. In Job 23:10 there is no preposition used at all to express the idea of “with” but the possessive is expressed by the genitive of possession for the first-person pronoun (Greek: *hodon mou*, “my way”). The Hebrew text of Job 23:14 is not given in the LXX. In Job 27:11 we have *para* used with a dative (“with the Almighty”) concerning those “things” (Greek: ἃ) that are “in his hand,” or “with” him figuratively in that they are under his control. In the LXX of Ps 50(49):11 the Psalmist expresses association between himself and the “beauty of the field” or with his possession or ownership of it, not by *pros*, but by *meta* (Greek: *met’ emou*, “with me,” “mine”). Ps 73(72):23 also uses *meta*, not *pros*, but even here the sense is clearly one of personal association in that Jah ‘holds the Psalmist’s right hand.’ Deuble cites Gen 40:14 as, “Keep me in mind when it goes well with you,” but the translated expression does not contain *pros* at all (though it does occur later in the verse, where it involves personal association, “And you will speak concerning me with Pharaoh [Greek: *pros Pharaon*]”). 2(4) Ki 3:12 does not use *pros* or any Greek preposition at all in regards to the “word [*rema*] of the Lord” belonging to Jehoshaphat. Further, the context here is not all like what are told about “the Word” in Joh 1:1. Isa 59:12, Jer 23:28, 27:18, Job 14:5, Prov 2:1, and Prov 11:2, do not use *pros* or any other Greek preposition to describe a relationship between God and someone or something else in a way similar to how the Word is described in Joh 1:1-18 or in Rev 19:13. In Jer 23:28 we do have *pros* used with an accusative to refer to a spoken “word” of God that would be “with” a prophet. Here “word” *belongs to* a person by use of the genitive of possession (“the word of *me* [*mou*]”). This is not the case with *ho logos* in Joh 1:1-18. Impersonal things, even abstractions such as “truth” (for example, Deuble cites 2Joh 2 where it is said that “[truth] will be *with* [*meta*] us”) can be “with” us without being an individual person, that is, unless other factors indicate that an individual being is meant. But Deuble gives no examples from the Bible showing a figurative presentation of God’s impersonal spoken “word” having *theos* predicated of it, as we find for *ho logos* in Joh 1:1. Further, John’s *logos* is said to have “come to his own [people], but his own [people] did not take him in” (Joh 11). He (the *logos*) is also spoken of as giving others “authority to become God’s children, because they were exercising faith *in his name*” (Joh 1:12). Not one of the impersonal examples cited by Deuble uses such personal descriptions, and not one of them involves the use of a “name.” The John 1 *logos* is said to have “became flesh” and to be an “only-begotten from a father” (Joh 1:14, 18). Elsewhere we are told that the one who “became flesh” has the name, “the Word of God” (Rev 13:19). This one is nowhere else described as the ‘spoken word’ of God or

has been the trademark of translations that offer a rendering that is a contradiction to those untrained in Trinitarianism, namely, “the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

Notice, however, that Harner points out even those who have not argued for a “qualitative” sense for *theos* in John 1:1c have given the same “explanation” Harner gives, regardless of their grammatical understanding of *theos* in 1:1c! This “explanation” is none other than the Trinitarianism expressed by Bruce Vawter and quoted with approval by Harner, namely, “The Word is divine, but he is not all of divinity, for he has already been distinguished from another divine Person.”⁵¹

Here the Word is assumed to be *theos* only as a divine “Person” of the Trinity, not as “all of divinity,” since no one “Person” is the Trinity. What Harner has tried to do and what many Trinitarians since him have done where it concerns John 1:1c, is to line up their theological assumptions with their grammatical understanding of the text. But their assumption or “explanation” (Trinitarianism) has always been the same for Trinitarians whether they argue *theos* in 1:1c is definite or “qualitative.”

Thus, Harner refers to R.E. Brown who regards the translation “the Word was God” as correct only “for a modern Christian reader whose Trinitarian background has accustomed him to thinking of

as an impersonal ‘plan’ existing only in “God’s mind” before Jesus was born. Rather, God is said to have spoken words to him, which ‘words’ became ‘his [Jesus’] words.’ Consider these selections from Joh 8:23, 26, 28, and 42-43:

You are from the realms below; I am from the realms above. You are from this world; I am not from this world. ... I have many things to speak concerning you and to pass judgment upon. As a matter of fact, he that sent me is true, and the very things I heard from him I am speaking in the world. ... just as the Father taught me I speak these things. ... If God were your Father, you would love me, for from God I came forth and am here. Neither have I come of my own initiative at all, but that One sent me forth. Why is it you do not know what I am speaking? Because you cannot listen to my word.

Jesus speaks of coming “from the realms above,” and of ‘hearing things from God,’ things the ‘Father taught him’ which he is now speaking “in the world.” Though he had his “own initiative,” he came “from God” because God ‘sent him forth’ to speak the ‘words’ he was taught to speak. This is a clear presentation of personal preexistence and of a differentiation between his existence as “the Word” and the impersonal spoken ‘words’ of God in the Bible.

⁵¹ Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” pages 85-86 (underlining added).

'God' as a larger concept than 'God the Father.'"⁵² So, there we have it: A "Trinitarian background" is necessary in order to avoid misunderstanding the translation "the Word was God" because Trinitarians have been caught using grammatical arguments that if carried to their logical conclusion contradict Trinitarians' theological assumptions. But whether Trinitarians use what they consider to be the wrong grammatical arguments (Colwell's rule) or Harner's or a similar explanation, it is their "larger [Trinitarian] concept" of God that has kept them from identifying the "Word" as "the Father" or as "a god."

Trinitarians' greater problem has to do with their acceptance of *ho theos* in John 1:1b ("the Word was with God") as definite. The reason this is a problem is because any definite use of *theos* in the Bible would have to refer to the Trinity, not to the Father, as a "person" of *ho theos*, for there is only one *theos* in Trinitarianism (the Trinity). Yet, according to Bowman, "for JW's to translate 'a god' is in one sense grammatically possible, but only if they are willing to adopt a pagan interpretation of the entire verse."⁵³

In other words, for Bowman, all views of "G-god" that are not Trinitarian are "pagan" and unacceptable for understanding or translating John 1:1. But which translation and understanding of John 1:1 is really guilty of clashing with the Bible's teaching that the Father is the "one God," and that other beings besides the "one God" can be called "God" or "a god" in a biblical context? As I explained in Chapter 2, it is Bowman's Trinitarianism that is not biblical, and in fact contradictory to what the Bible does teach, and so it is not acceptable at all for understanding John 1:1.

Obviously, what is otherwise a clearly expressed biblical theology can be used as a means of understanding and, thus, to some extent translating other biblical texts that are not as clear, but that discuss or touch on the same or similar subjects. When it comes to John 1:1c, grammatically it could be translated, "the Word was God," "divine," or "a god," or it could be translated as I suggested in the Second Edition of this book (page 366), "the Word

⁵² Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns," page 86 (underlining added).

⁵³ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 62.

was a divine being.”⁵⁴ Therefore, an accurate understanding of the biblical God and of his “S/sons” is key to understanding the use of *theos* in John 1:1, and in fact it is critical to understanding *each and every single use of “G-god” in the Bible*.

Instead of assuming what is truly “pagan,” and therefore not an acceptable means of interpreting John 1:1, we simply need to look at what the Bible clearly teaches about “G-god” and of his divine “S/sons.” We know that the OT singles out one of God’s “S/sons” in a particular way by mentioning his name along with God’s name (Proverbs 30:4). So there is good reason to believe what is said of “the Word” being “with God” in John 1:1 is said in reference to one of these “S/sons,” one who was given “the name ... the Word of God.”—Revelation 19:13.

As I explained on pages 301-308, being “divine” in one biblical sense involves having the authority to act as God, and in another biblical sense it has to do with being ‘spirit and not flesh.’ Jehovah’s Witnesses accept all of these biblical teachings and they are all perfectly in harmony with their translation and understanding of John 1:1. The same things cannot be said of Trinitarians who use of the Trinity to interpret uses of “G-god.”

More on “qualitative.” Returning to the grammatical issues surrounding John 1:1, in my opinion the primary problem with the studies put forth by Trinitarians Harner, Don Hartley,⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Compare Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), page 60, sec. D.3.a.(1), who states that “from the point of view of grammar alone, θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος could be rendered ‘the Word was a god’ ... But the theological context, viz., John’s monotheism, makes this rendering of 1:1c impossible” (emphasis added). C.H. Dodd, “New Testament Translation Problems II,” *BT* 28.1 (1977), pages 101-102, makes a similar comment, stating, “‘The Word was a god.’ As a word-for-word translation it cannot be faulted.” But Dodd nonetheless believes it is unacceptable because “it runs counter to the current of Johannine thought, and indeed of Christian thought as a whole.” What Dodd really means is that “a god” runs contrary to assumed *Trinitarian* “thought as a whole”! I have argued here and in Chapter 2 that Harris, Dodd, and others who argue similarly fail to consider the proper theological context of John’s statement, which when considered actually supports a translation such as “a god.”

⁵⁵ Don Hartley, “Criteria for Determining Qualitative Nouns With a Special View to Understanding the Colwell Construction” (M.Th. thesis; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996). For further discussion of some of Hartley’s claims concerning John 1:1 and other related texts, see my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 2d ed. (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), pages 338-344.

Daniel Wallace,⁵⁶ and others is they assume Trinitarianism. They then put forth arguments which support and which never will contradict what they assume is true (the Trinity). This ties in directly with the issues discussed in Chapter 2, about how Trinitarians understand the Word to be “God” in the sense of a divine “person” of *God*, and in this case “God” is the Trinity. But there is no expression of this view of G-god (*theos*) in the Bible, and so Trinitarianism is an anachronistic theology for it finds no expression in the very document in which it is said to be based, because it came into existence after the NT was written.

If the Bible presented or used the words for “G-god” in ways which express Trinitarianism, then Christians should accept such concepts. Why would we not? I can think of no reasons for rejecting the Trinity other than because it is not taught in the Bible, and what the Bible does teach contradicts it. *Theos* in the LXX or in the NT is never used in reference to a Trinity, and the biblical words for “G-god” are never articulated or presented as having anything to do with a divine “person” of a Trinity, least of all in John 1:1! The Trinity has no good reasons for being assumed by anyone as a biblical truth for use in interpreting the Bible or, worse, translating *and* then interpreting a biblical text (such as John 1:1) in a way that promotes Trinitarianism.

By contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses rightly make use of the Bible's terms for “G-god,” both where it is applied to the “one God” and where it is applied to his “S/sons.” Because the basis for our understanding the biblical uses of “G-god” is the Bible itself, not uses or understandings of “G-god” that were first expressed and associated with the Bible long after it was written. By using the Bible to identify the “one God” as “the Father,” then when we come to the use of *theos* for the Word in 1:1c there is no need to try and fit the syntax in which the noun is used into a rule that will allow for anachronistic understandings (divine “person” and “Trinity”) of the biblical noun (*theos*) used.

⁵⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pages 256-270. For further discussion of some of Wallace's claims concerning Joh 1:1 and other related texts, see my *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 2d ed., pages 344-348, and my *Three Dissertations on the Teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002), note 10, pages 218-220.

Nouns in syntactical relationships such as in John 1:1c can be emphasized by their placement in a clause or in a sentence, and in emphasizing the noun its qualities are naturally a part of the emphasized noun’s meaning. But this is true for nouns in many different syntactical positions and it is not unique to the grammar of John 1:1c.⁵⁷ Further, a noun’s qualities are *always* present and therefore discernable and expressed when a noun is used.

Consider the noun *hamartolos* (“a sinner”) in Luke 7:39. Here a Pharisee observes the treatment given to Jesus by a woman whom the Pharisee considers “a sinner” (Greek: *hamartolos estin*). The syntax is the same as that for *theos* in John 1:1c, namely, an anarthrous predicate noun preceding a form of the Greek verb “to be/exist.” Hartley believes this example is “clearly qualitative.” He reasons:

That this last example is qualitative and not indefinite is brought out further by the preceding clause, *If he were a prophet* (i.e., exercising prophetic abilities) *he would have known what kind of woman this was who touched him, that she is sinful*. The kind of woman she was is answered by the predicate construction, she was sinful.⁵⁸

If in this instance the noun *hamartolos* is “not indefinite,” and since there is nothing to suggest (nor does Hartley argue for) understanding *hamartolos* as definite, then what Hartley appears to be doing is trying to create or at least further a grammatical understanding for a Greek noun in a certain case, in a certain grammatical position, that will allow him and other Trinitarians to then apply *theos* to the Word without contradicting Trinitarianism. But if “sinful” is the meaning of the predicate nominative

⁵⁷ See my discussion of the texts involving the Greek noun for “Sabbath” in response to Wallace (*Three Dissertations on the Teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, note 10, pages 218-219), showing that whether you have “Sabbath” used as an anarthrous preverbal predicate nominative in texts like Joh 5:10, or in the dative case as the object of a preposition, the qualities of the noun (that is, the *kind of day*) are conveyed in each usage without any discernable difference in meaning based on the texts themselves. See Richard Stuart Cervin, “Word order in ancient Greek: VSO, SVO, SOV, or all of the above?” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Illinois, 1990), chapters 3 and 4 for more on fronting and extraposition in ancient Greek.

⁵⁸ Hartley, “Criteria for Determining Qualitative Nouns,” page 62.

hamartolos in Luke 7:39, it is applied to an individual who must therefore *be* “a sinner”!

If the subject has the qualities of “a sinner,” then that subject *is* “a sinner.” If the subject has the qualities or nature of God, then that one *is* either “God” or “a god.” The same is true for *pneuma* (if “spirit” then, when applied to an individual, “a spirit”) in John 3:6 and 4:24, for *prophetes* (“prophet-like” or “a prophet”) in John 4:19, and for *diabolos* (“slandorous” or “a devil”) in John 6:70.

There are no good reasons for suggesting that in any of the above texts or in John 1:1c the predicate nouns used are intended for anyone but for individuals who are instances of the predicate nouns. There is nothing in any of these texts to suggest the nouns are not definite or indefinite, simply because of their position in the clause or sentence, or that only their “qualities” are communicated through the placement of the predicate noun. The Trinitarian concept of “qualitativeness” comes complete with an assumption about in what sense the Word *can be* “qualitatively” *theos*. In other words, the “qualitativeness” desired by Trinitarians is one where God is a Trinity and where the nature of the triune God is shared by three “persons.” As I have shown so far in this book, the nature of the “one God” that might be expressed qualitatively based on the Bible’s use of *theos* has nothing to do with a Trinity of “persons.”

In spite of this, for Trinitarians the Word must share the nature of *theos* without actually being *theos* definitely (which is often communicated through with the translation “God”) or indefinitely (as in “a god,” or one of God’s “sons”). Yet, though the Bible itself allows for *theos* to be used of the Word in one of several ways as I explained previously, not one of the Bible’s uses of the terms for “G-god” is consistent with or supports Trinitarian theology.

Ultimately, the assumptions of Trinitarians have shielded the Trinity doctrine against some of its supporters’ own grammatical mistakes and theological errors. But whether they are arguing for Trinitarianism by means of Colwell’s argument for definiteness, or whether it is Harner, Hartley, Wallace or another Trinitarian’s attempt to highlight and apply only the qualities or nature of the noun *theos* to the Word in John 1:1c, the common element in all of these efforts is an attempt to justify what is assumed as true from the outset: Trinitarianism.

So for Harner and for other Trinitarians it is only by “differentiating between *theos*, as the nature that the Logos shared with God, and *ho theos* as the [Trinitarian] ‘person’ to whom the Logos stood in relation [that Trinitarians] can say of the Logos that ‘he was God.’”⁵⁹ But this ‘differentiation’ is *always* present for Trinitarians whenever they use *theos* or “God” for any member of the Trinity! That is why Trinitarians do not identity the definite *ho theos* of John 1:1b as their “one God,” the Trinity, but rather as the Trinitarian “person” of the Father. So that is what they do, even though is it “the God” not “the Father” with whom “the Word” is said to exist according to John 1:1.

Thus, even for Trinitarians *ho theos* in John 1:1b is not definite in terms of *theos*. Only as a “person” of the Trinity can the Father be said to ‘share the nature of *theos*,’ and yet that is precisely the same understanding given to *theos* when used of the Word in John 1:1c! So neither reference to *theos* in John 1:1b or 1:1c refers to the Trinity, the “one God” of Trinitarians! Yet, “G-god” is the term used in both references, though different in grammatical usage. Jehovah’s Witnesses recognize the term used, and then convey the sense for “G-god” taught in the text, in its context, and we make sure it is consistent with the overall book’s teaching about the subject(s), and also with the Bible as a whole. The translation of “a god” for the Word who was “in the beginning with God” is consistent with all of these.

I believe it is clear that in claiming that the NWT’s citation and use of Harner’s article “betrays a complete misunderstanding of his article,”⁶⁰ Bowman fails to recognize that the NWT’s citation of Harner’s article is in the context of its rejection of Colwell’s claims, claims that Harner does in fact reject. While Harner and other Trinitarians do argue for a “qualitative” understanding of *theos* in John 1:1c that is consistent with Trinitarianism, that does not mean non-Trinitarians (such as Jehovah’s Witnesses) cannot use Harner’s article or some of his conclusions to support a particular view of *theos* in John 1:1c as qualitative, but without at the same time assuming Trinitarianism by association.

⁵⁹ Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” pages 86-87.

⁶⁰ Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, page 72.

Jah as “a God.” In support of his view of how a Christian might rightly refer to the Word in John 1:1 as “a ‘G-god,’” Bowman refers to Luke 20:37-38. Here the NWT reads: “But that the dead are raised up even Moses disclosed, in the account about the thornbush, when he calls Jehovah ‘the God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob.’ He is a God not of the dead, but of the living, for they are all living to him” (underlining added). After making the point that even Jehovah is called “a God” according to the NWT, Bowman writes:

If this were the “qualitative” or “indefinite” sense to which the JW’s attributed *theos* in John 1:1, there would be no problem. In that case, we would understand the expression “a God” as we do in Luke 20:38 and Mark 12:27, not as implying one God in contrast to another God, or a deity of a lesser nature in comparison to another deity, but simply as speaking of the only true God from the standpoint of his nature—what kind of “a God” he is.⁶¹

In Luke 20:38 and Mark 12:27 the reason why “a God” in reference to Jah is a reference specifically to ‘what kind of God’ he is (that is, as ‘a God of the living’), and not necessarily intended to imply a contrast between one God and another G-god, is because *there is no other God mentioned* in the context of Jesus’ discussion with the Sadducees, with whom he could be so contrasted! But in John 1:1 we *do* have more than one *theos* (not more than one “person” of *theos*) explicitly mentioned and described as “with” each other.

Equating the use of “a God” in Luke 20:38 and in Mark 12:27 with *theos* in John 1:1c ignores the context, specifically, its reference to *ho theos* “with” whom the Word existed. Additionally, this “a God” is in the immediate context of Luke 20:37 and Mark 12:26 further described as “the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” This shows it is Jah God Almighty in view, not some lesser God in comparison to another “G-god” who is not anywhere even mentioned in either account! Peter describes

⁶¹ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*, pages 48-49.

Jesus’ relationship to “the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob” this way according to Acts 3:13 (NIV):

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified *his servant* [τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ, *ton paida autou*] Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.

The notion of ‘servitude’ surely conveys the idea that the one who is the “servant” is lesser than that one whom he serves (compare John 14:28). John 1:1 identifies this “servant” as ‘a god who existed in the beginning with God,’ and later as one of God’s “sons” whom God sent forth (John 1:14; 8:42). But that is not all that John wrote about “the Word” in his Gospel. Indeed, he had a great deal more to say in the opening verses of his historical account.

Jesus as the “only-begotten god” of John 1:18

Monogenes and the textual variants in John 1:18. I can and have provided good reasons from the Bible for believing that Jah has many “sons” (Genesis 6:4; Psalm 82:6; Job 38:7), and that he has one “S/son” who is singled out in the OT (Psalm 2:7, 12; Proverbs 30:4; Hosea 11:1 [compare Matthew 2:15]), and who is in many places in the NT identified as Jesus, “the Son of God” (Mark 3:11-12; Acts 9:19-20; Hebrews 4:14; 1 John 4:15). In the NWT of John 1:18, we read the following about this “Son” of God (underlining added), “No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten god who is in the bosom [position] with the Father is the one that has explained him.”

For the first underlined part of the above translation there are several variant readings in the Greek manuscripts of John’s text that have led to different understandings of what he wrote. Even where a particular variant is concerned, more than one translation has been offered by scholars and by Bible translators. Before I evaluate several different translations and understandings of this text, consider the primary variants for verse 18 along with their

most significant manuscript support and possible translations of the variants listed⁶²:

- Variant:** μονογενῆς θεός, *monogenes theos*.
- Textual support:** B (Vaticanus [4th cent. CE]), P⁶⁶ (Bodmer [c. 200 CE]), Ⲛ^{*} (original Sinaiticus [4th cent. CE]), C (Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, 5th cent. CE).
- Translations:** “an/the only-begotten/unique god/God”;
“an/the only-begotten/unique one, a god/God.”

This reading has good manuscript support from early and highly regarded sources. It applies *theos* to the Word who “became flesh” and who “is in the bosom with the Father” after having “explained him.” This same application was made in John 1:1c, though in verse 18 there is another term, *monogenes*, that either modifies *theos* (“only-begotten/unique god/God”) or is what is known as a “substantivized” adjective, which means that *monogenes* functions as a noun similar to “only-begotten/unique [one].” If *monogenes* here functions as a noun, then *theos* is a further description of the *monogenes* rather than *monogenes* serving as a modifier for *theos* as in “only-begotten/unique god/God.”

- Variant:** ὁ μονογενῆς θεός, *ho monogenes theos*.
- Textual support:** P⁷⁵ (Bodmer [c. early 3rd cent. CE]), Ⲛ^c (corrected Sinaiticus [4th or 5th cent. (?) CE]).

⁶² These variants are taken from *New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, John, Rueben Swanson, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 1995), page 8. For a further discussion of the textual variants relating to Joh 1:18, see B.A. Mastin, “A Neglected Feature of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel,” *NTS* 22 (1976), pages 37-41; B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Corrected Edition (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), page 198; Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* (JSNTSup 107; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), pages 101-109. The NWT Reference Bible (1984) also lists in its critical apparatus several key variants and their witnesses.

Translations: “the only-begotten/unique god/God”; “the only-begotten/unique one, a god/God.”

The only difference between this reading and the first one is that the above variant has the Greek article (*ho*, “the”) before *monogenes*. All of the same translations given for the previous reading are possible here, except for the use of “a” since it is not likely that there is an indefinite sense associated with the use of the Greek article. However, if we consider *ho monogenes* as a substantive (“the only-begotten/unique *one*”) it is then quite possible that we should translate *theos* in this reading as “a god.”

Variant: ὁ μονογενὴς υἱὸς, *ho monogenes huios*.

Textual support: A (Alexandrinus [5th cent. CE]), C^c (corrected copy of 5th cent. CE Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus), and Byzantine witnesses (E F G H S Y Ω and others from the 6th cent. CE).

Translations: “the only-begotten/unique son/Son”; “the only-begotten/unique one, a/the son/Son.”

Here we have several types of Greek manuscripts from the fifth century CE onward that have the Greek word for “son,” not *theos*, and all of these readings have the Greek article before *monogenes*. Additionally, all of the above readings of verse 18 also tell us that “no man has seen God at any time.” The earliest manuscripts strongly support the use of *theos* for the Word (the prehuman Jesus). But if this is the true reading, how are we to understand the use of *theos* together with *ho monogenes*, or with just *monogenes* in this verse?

The translation and meaning of monogenes in the NT.

According to John Dahms: “It seems clear that *monogenes*, when used of persons, was always understood to include the idea of generation. This understanding did not have its beginning at the time of the Arian controversy.”⁶³ Yet, many who embrace the doctrine of the Trinity are not particularly fond of referring to Jesus

⁶³ John V. Dahms, “The Johannine Use Of Monogenes Reconsidered,” *NTS* 29 (1983), page 228.

as an “only-begotten god,” and so they accept readings or prefer translations of John 1:18 that do not refer to him as such. For example, Dr. James White writes:

I find the NRSV's translation to be the best, “God the only Son.” If we wanted something a little more literal, I would suggest, “the only Son, *who is* God.” This preserves the word order that John uses, placing *monogenes* as a title immediately preceding *theos* (God). What is John telling us by using such an unusual phrase? One thing is for certain: he is *not* telling us that Jesus Christ was “created” at some time in the past. He is *not* denying everything he said in the previous seventeen verses and turning Jesus into a creation! Such ideas flow from wrong thinking about what *monogenes* means. Remember that the term means “unique” or “one of a kind.” In light of this, John's meaning is clear. In fact, I would submit that outside of a Trinitarian understanding of this passage, John is making no sense at all!⁶⁴

White goes on to explain that when John writes “no one has seen God at any time,” by “God” John “is referring to the Father.”⁶⁵ Of course, for White “the Father” is the first “person” of the Trinity, a doctrine which White assumes is true when interpreting this text.⁶⁶ In addition to assuming Trinitarianism in order to interpret this text, indeed, as the *only* “understanding of this passage” that ‘makes sense,’ White prefers the translations “God the only Son” or “the only Son, *who is* God” for *monogenes theos*. He rejects the variant readings that actually contain the Greek word for “Son,” but he inserts it nonetheless in both of his preferred translations of *monogenes theos*. Why?

In Chapter 5 I will discuss “everything [John] said in the previous seventeen verses” of his Prologue where it concerns the existence of the Word. In this chapter I have also provided some good reasons for interpreting John's use of *theos* in the light of the rest of the Bible, rather than in the light of Trinitarianism. The OT

⁶⁴ James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998), pages 62-63.

⁶⁵ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 63.

⁶⁶ White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, pages 26-28.

and the NT present “one God” as “the Father” who also has many divine sons and one special “Son,” all of whom are “gods” (see Chapter 2, pages 186-209). On the other hand, White’s first preferred translation (“God the only Son”) ‘makes no sense’ for several biblical reasons.

First, “God” is *not* “the only Son”! He is the Father, and he has *many* sons. Second, the use of “God” here is assumed by White to involve a divine “person” of the Trinity. But the text itself, indeed, the whole of the OT and the NT, says nothing about understanding the terms for G-god in this way. Also, since White believes in ‘only one God,’ the Trinity, then his use of “God” for a “person” of this Trinity depends on his theological preference for who is the subject here, that is, either the Trinity itself or a “person” of the Trinity. But, again, the text gives us no basis for making any such distinction between these two understandings for “G-god.” They come solely from White’s Trinitarian theology.

The idea of sonship, absent biblical articulation to the contrary, is closely related to the idea of creation or of having received life from someone, namely, from a father. Indeed, Jesus himself is recorded as saying, “I live because of the Father” (John 5:26; 6:57). In Hebrews 1:2 he is described as God’s “Son” and in Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:6 (both texts discussed in Chapter 5) this Son is called God’s “Firstborn,” even the “firstborn of all creation.” Then in John 1:14, 18 “the Word” is called *monogenes*, or “only-begotten.” While I will discuss the meaning of “firstborn” in Chapter 5, does *monogenes* mean “only-begotten” or “unique,” “one of a kind” as White and other Trinitarians would have us believe? Returning to the study of *monogenes* by John Dahms, he writes:

We have examined all of the evidence which has come to our attention concerning the meaning of *monogenes* in the Johannine writings and have found that the majority view of modern scholarship has very little to support it. On the other hand, the external evidence, especially that from Philo, Justin and Tertullian, and the internal evidence from the context of its

occurrences, makes clear that 'only begotten' is the most accurate translation after all.⁶⁷

The idea involved in being "only-begotten" here includes temporality, which means that someone came forth from someone else, and is therefore not eternal. Since the Father is the source of all things (1 Corinthians 8:6), it is fitting the Word is presented by John as "an only-begotten son from a father" (John 1:14). Why, then, should we not accept that the Word is "an/the only-begotten god" from the Father according to the description of him in verse 18? If he is a divine Son of God, and if there are other divine sons of God, all of whom existed with God "in the beginning" (Job 38:7; John 1:1), then how is it John is "making no sense at all" if he is teaching us the very same thing about God's "only-begotten" or "firstborn" Son?

While I would not go quite as far as Dahms in stating that *monogenes* 'when used of persons *always* includes the idea of generation' (quoted above on page 335), this is often the case. There are also certain etymological arguments (that is, arguments that have to do with a word's origin and development). For example, *monogenes* is a combination of two words, μόνος ([*monos*] meaning "only") and γένος ([*genos*] meaning "kind"), hence the meaning, "one of a kind," "unique." But while there is no dispute as to the meaning of *monos* ("only"), since *genos* is related etymologically to γίγνομαι (*ginomai*, "to become") it could very well convey the notion of "birth."

In support of this view, Dahms points to several words ending in -γενής (-*genes*) where the idea of derivation from someone is present (διογενής ["sprung from Zeus"], γηγενής ["earthborn"], εὐγενής ["well-born"], συγγενής ["inborn"]).⁶⁸ Gerard Pendrick, who argues for the meaning "one of a kind" for *monogenes*, lists several more of such examples (αἰθρηγενής ["born in clear sky"] and παλαιγενής ["born long ago"]).⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Dahms, "The Johannine Use Of Monogenes Reconsidered," page 231.

⁶⁸ Dahms, "The Johannine Use Of Monogenes Reconsidered," pages 222-223.

⁶⁹ Gerard Pendrick, "ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ," *NTS* 41 (1995), page 588. All of the definitions in these examples ending in -γενής come from Henry G. Liddell and Robert

However, not all words ending in -γενής convey the idea of “birth.”⁷⁰ Thus, both Dahms and Pendrick agree that usage, not etymology, must be the proper guide in determining the meaning of *monogenes*. When this is done, it seems clear that *monogenes* in non-filial contexts (that is, in contexts where there is no expressed relationship between a son or a daughter and his or her parent) can and often does convey the meaning “one of a kind” or “unique,” in classical and in patristic Greek literature.⁷¹ But in the NT, in filial contexts where *monogenes* is used of an offspring’s relationship to a parent the idea of generation appears always to be present, or at least implied.⁷² Since even Pendrick agrees that *monogenes* “occasionally” carries the connotation of birth, its meaning in John 1:18 must be considered closely in relation to its immediate context and also in the light of other contexts where a similar usage can be found.

In the NT *monogenes* occurs nine times. In Hebrews 11:17 it is used of Isaac’s relationship to Abraham. Pendrick believes that its use here can hardly carry any idea of derivation since Abraham had fathered Ishmael, not Isaac only. Pendrick believes that the meaning “unique” fits well here, since Isaac was the special child of promise.⁷³ Though Pendrick’s view is possible, in human terms a child must have *two* parents and so Isaac could have been considered the only-begotten, the only-*derived* or only-generated son of *both* Abraham and Sarah. By contrast, Ishmael was the son of both Abraham and Hagar. From this biblical perspective, Isaac could be Abraham’s “only-begotten” son. There is also the possibility that a “unique” generation is meant, given the fact that

Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., rev. H.S. Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

⁷⁰ See Pendrick, “ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ,” page 587. For example, Pendrick cites θηλυγενής (“of female sex”) and ἑτερογενής (“of different kinds”) as examples where the idea of “birth” is not present in words ending in -γενής.

⁷¹ See Pendrick, “ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ,” pages 588-590.

⁷² Pendrick, “ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ,” page 590. Compare Pendrick’s conclusion on the same page (590), where after considering several examples outside of the NT that do convey the idea of generation, Pendrick concludes that in most cases where *monogenes* is applied to offspring “the notion of birth or derivation is at the least not required, and in a few cases positively forbidden by the context.”

⁷³ Pendrick, “ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ,” pages 592-593.

God intervened and allowed Sarah to conceive a child in spite of her old age.—Genesis 18:9-14.

Regarding the three uses of *monogenes* in Luke's Gospel (7:12; 8:42; 9:38), "only-begotten" or "only" fit well with each text's context.⁷⁴ This leaves the final five occurrences of *monogenes* in the NT, all of which are found in John's writings (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Pendrick believes that both "positive and negative considerations" argue that *monogenes* in these five passages should be understood in the sense of "unique" or "only."⁷⁵ But the "positive considerations" Pendrick cites really prove nothing of the sort. In fact, they flatly contradict the otherwise clear teachings of the Bible. Pendrick argues:

Because Jesus is the only Son of God, His sending into the world is the supreme proof of God's love for the world. Here as elsewhere in John and 1 John, μονογενής emphasizes Jesus' unique status as the *only* son of God.⁷⁶

As noted earlier in relation to one of Dr. White's preferred translations of John 1:18 (see pages 336-337), Jesus is *not* God's *only* "S/son"! If we translate *monogenes* as "unique" in these passages (especially in 1:18) then we invite the question, "In what sense was the Word 'unique'?" The translation "only-begotten" actually answers this question in one sense (see the discussion in the next sub-section) while at the same time remaining consistent with the biblical teaching that God *does* have other "S/sons."

Further, "only-begotten" is consistent with the sayings of Jesus and with the rest of the NT teaching regarding his generation or receipt of life from the Father (John 5:26; 6:57; 1 John 5:18). This leads me to Pendrick's 'negative consideration,' namely, that Jesus is never spoken of as having been "begotten" in John's Gospel or in his letters.⁷⁷ Yet, better reasons can be presented in favor of a much different conclusion.

⁷⁴ The NWT Reference Bible (1984) has "only-begotten" in the text of these three verses, with "only" in the footnotes.

⁷⁵ Pendrick, "ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ," pages 594-595.

⁷⁶ Pendrick, "ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ," page 595 (underlining added, but the italics are original to Pendrick).

⁷⁷ Pendrick, "ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ," page 596.

The “only-begotten god.” Pendrick believes it is uncertain whether 1 John 5:18 (ἀλλ ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τηρεῖ αὐτόν, “but the one born from God is protecting him”) applies to Jesus or to the believers John previously mentioned. However, 1 John 5:18 is not as uncertain as Pendrick thinks. Though the variant for the word “himself” (Greek: ἑαυτόν, *heauton*) is found in place of “him” (Greek: αὐτόν, *auton*) in a good number of witnesses,⁷⁸ the context and the use of “protecting” (Greek: τηρεῖ, *tereî*) weigh heavily in favor of “him.”

This last reading would make “the one born from God” (Jesus), the ‘protector,’ rather than “himself” which could mean those of us who are ‘born from God *protect ourselves*’! Yet, in John 17:15 Jesus requests the Father “protect” (τηρήσης, *tereses*) the disciples “because of the wicked one,” and in 2 Thessalonians 3:3 Paul refers to the “Lord” (Jesus) who “will guard you from the wicked one” (Greek: φυλάξει ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ). Thus, the NT clearly depicts the Father and Jesus as our protectors and guardians from the “wicked one,” and it is the “wicked one” who is also in view in 1 John 5:18.⁷⁹

In view of this and in the light of the absolute use of *ho gennetheis* (= “the one born,” “the one generated,” or “the one begotten”) there are good reasons to conclude that 1 John 5:18 is referring to Jesus as “the one born from God.” It is not only the use of *monogenes* in John 1:18 and in other NT texts (John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) that shows Jesus ‘lives because of the Father’ (John 6:57). 1 John 5:18 and the rest of the NT teaching reveal Jesus’ as God’s “Son,” indeed, as the “firstborn.”—Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6 (both texts are discussed further in Chapter 5).

As for the Old Latin and the Vulgate translations of *monogenes*, Pendrick notes these “regularly” translate *monogenes*

⁷⁸ See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, page 718, for a listing of key variants for both readings. Metzger also points out that the UBS Committee “understood ὁ γεννηθεὶς [*ho gennetheis*, ‘the one born’] to refer to Christ.” This is apparently due in part to the fact that the absolute use of *ho gennetheis* is never used by John for believers.

⁷⁹ Though the use of τηρέω with ἑαυτοῦ is not unknown in the NT (see 1Co 7:37; Jas 1:27; Jude 6, 21), the specific reference to protection from “the wicked one” (ὁ πονηρός) in 1Jo 5:18 fits better with the view expressed elsewhere in the Bible, where either God (Matt 6:13) or Jesus (2Th 3:3) guards or rescues us from Satan.

by the Latin *unicus* (“unique”). But Jerome also uses *unigenitus* (“only-begotten”) in several texts of christological significance, including John 1:18.⁸⁰ Dahms notes Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315—367 CE) uses *unigenitus* when quoting John 1:1-14 and 1:18 in his *De Trinitate*. In view of this, Dahms concludes, “It is hardly conceivable that he could have made such a [use of *unigenitus*] without more ado unless his readers were familiar with *unigenitus* in their Latin New Testaments.”⁸¹

Pendrick would perhaps attribute Jerome's use of “unigenitus” to influence from the meaning *monogenes* allegedly came to have during the controversy between the Arians and Trinitarians. In fact, Pendrick concludes the meaning “only-begotten” was only fully “guaranteed” after the development of Trinitarian theology, which took place during the third, fourth and fifth centuries CE.⁸²

As I explained earlier in this chapter, it is legitimate to translate *monogenes* as “only-begotten.” The exact sense in which Jesus as God's Son is “only-begotten” in comparison to other “sons” of God can be understood by comparison with the biblical teaching about Isaac's birth from Abraham. Isaac was considered Abraham's “only-begotten” son because he was uniquely and miraculously born from Abraham through Sarah. Similarly, the Word's generation from God was also unique both in terms of the manner of his generation and the singular parent involved.⁸³

⁸⁰ See Pendrick, “ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ,” page 597. Compare Dahms, “The Johannine Use Of Monogenes Reconsidered,” pages 225-226.

⁸¹ Dahms, “The Johannine Use Of Monogenes Reconsidered,” page 226.

⁸² Pendrick, “ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ,” page 600.

⁸³ Compare Robert Gordis, “The ‘Begotten’ Messiah in the Qumran Scrolls,” VT 7 (1957), pages 191-194, who cites a passage from “The Rule of the Congregation” found in 1QS_a, which he restores and renders as follows: “This is the order of sitting for the men of renown invited to the convocation, to the counsels of the Community: When (God) begets the Messiah, with them shall come the Priest, ...” The same reading is given by Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), page 127 (see also Craig A. Evans, “A Note on the ‘First-Born Son’ of 4Q369,” DSD 2.2 [1995], page 186). Gordis concludes, “If the proposed restoration ‘el, which has much to recommend it, is adopted, our passage is highly important as a source for the concept of a Divinely begotten Messiah” (“The ‘Begotten’ Messiah in the Qumran Scrolls,” page 194 [underlining added]). Compare Mic 5:2, where the pre-human origin of the Messiah is also taught. Evans, “A Note on the ‘First-Born Son’ of

In John 1:14 *monogenes* is used apart from a noun and so it can be a substantivized adjective with “one” or “son” as understood nouns (“an/the only-begotten [one/son]”). In John 1:18 *monogenes* is followed by the noun for “G-god” (*theos*), so here *monogenes* can function as an adjective modifying the noun *theos* (“G-god”), meaning “a/the only-begotten G-god.” *Monogenes* also appears to modify the noun “son” that follows it in Luke 7:12 and in John 3:18, both of which are in reference to Jesus. In these two texts we could translate *monogenes* as “unique,” but not as “only,” if by “only” we mean God does not have other “sons” (Job 38:7). Only in a special, comparative sense with these other “sons of God” could we use “only” in John 3:18, and that sense is conveyed by the use of *monogenes*.

Similarly, in John 1:18 we could translate *monogenes theos* as “a/the unique G-god,” but not as “the only G-god,” for both the Father and his other “sons” are “G-gods” in the Bible, as shown in Chapter 2. Further, John could have simply used μόνος (*monos*, “only”) as he does in John 5:44 (τοῦ μόνου θεοῦ, “the only God”) if “only” is what he meant in John 1:18. Instead, John presents the Word as God’s *monogenes* (3:18), which can be explained by means of the Bible to mean the Word was given life in a unique, direct way not true for “all things” the Father made “through” or “by” (instrumental sense) the Word (John 1:3).

John’s use of *monogenes* as an adjectival modifier for *theos* (“only-begotten god”) in John 1:18 is also consistent with his understanding of God’s “S/sons” as “gods,” as taught in John 10:30-36 (see Chapter 2, pages 194-204). Further, John’s description of the Word as an “only-begotten G-god” or even just as *monogenes* (John 1:14) shows the Word is not the *same* God as the Father, a point John made clear also in John 1:1.

The Father was not “begotten” by anyone, and that is why he is not called “Son,” “Firstborn,” or “only-begotten” in the Bible. The Father does not receive life from anyone, for he is the “source of

4Q369,” pages 187-188, lists four reasons why this restoration of 1QSa should be adopted, but he believes the text might be a reference to the fact that “someday God will raise up a messianic figure,” instead of some sort of divine generation. See also my more recent article, “Bart D. Ehrman, Daniel B. Wallace, and the Syntax and Meaning of John 1:18,” *Watching the Ministry* (November 1, 2011).

life” to all (Psalm 36:9). Even in the writings of Justin Martyr and in other religious writers of the second and third centuries CE, Jesus is often referred to as “only-begotten” in contrast to the Father who is always the “*unbegotten*, unutterable God.”⁸⁴ This is no doubt one reason why Justin argued:

There is, and there is said to be, another God [θεὸς ... ἕτερος] and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them.⁸⁵

Justin’s presentation of the Logos’ generation from God in the following is also fairly consistent with what we read in the Bible:

God begat before all creatures a Beginning, who was a certain rational power proceeding from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos; ... For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father’s will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will.⁸⁶

What Justin here writes is in large part consistent with the biblical presentation of Jesus as God’s “firstborn,” as his “only-begotten” Son who received his life from the Father. Christians do not need to deny Jesus’ prehuman birth from God and invent beliefs that contradict this biblical teaching before we accept him

⁸⁴ *Dialogue With Trypho*, ANF 1, page 263 (emphasis added). One exception is in Ignatius (Eph 7:2 [ANF 1, page 52, chap. 7]), who refers to Jesus as “flesh and spirit, born and unborn [ἀγέννητος].” Ignatius also calls Jesus “the only son [τοῦ μόνου υἱοῦ]” of the “Father Most High” (Rom, preface). Pendrick’s suggestion (“ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ,” page 598) that this use of μόνος (*monos*, “only”) is a “reflection of the Johannine μονογενής” is not supported by any evidence. Whether Ignatius understood Jesus to be *monogenes* in the same sense that the apostle John taught this is unclear. But the use of “unbegotten” in Ignatius for Jesus provides some indication that Ignatius’ understanding of Jesus as “unbegotten” was not in agreement with either the NT view of Jesus as God’s “only-begotten” or with the view of many other early church writers like Justin (quoted above), who regularly distinguish between Jesus and the Father as “begotten”/“only-begotten” and “unbegotten,” respectively.

⁸⁵ *Dialogue With Trypho*, ANF 1, page 223 (underlining added).

⁸⁶ *Dialogue With Trypho*, ANF 1, page 227 (underlining added).

for who the Bible tells us he is: the “only-begotten G-god” from the Father, his “firstborn” Son. But, in view of all that is said of the Word in John’s Prologue, is it proper for us to address the Son as ‘our God’?

John 20:28: Jesus as ‘Our God’

“My Lord and my God.” When the risen Jesus confronted Thomas with wound marks in his hands and in his feet,⁸⁷ the previously doubting Thomas exclaimed to Jesus as recorded in John 20:28, “My Lord and my God!” In the Greek of Thomas’ response (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, *ho kyrios mou kai ho theos mou*), the article (“the”) is used before the word for “God,” making it a definite reference. Though this in and of itself amounts to a contradiction of Trinitarianism, which confesses only the Trinity as the “one God,” with Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit as “persons” of this “God,” Trinitarians regularly cite this text as if it supports their belief that Jesus is a “person” of the Trinity. Further, the use of “God” for Jesus in John 20:28 is often presented by Trinitarians as if it contradicts the belief of Jehovah’s Witnesses that Jesus is “a god.”

In Chapter 2, pages 176-209, I presented good reasons from the Bible showing how Jesus and other “sons of God” are both “gods” and at times serve as “God” to us, because they express the “one God’s” will alone, not their own. In the case of Jesus, this is true more so than any other son of God, which is simply another way of saying that Jesus worshiped his Father in ways that no other son of God has done. Because of this total devotion, even to the point of death by torture, God “exalted him ... so that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the ground, and every tongue should openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8-11). If, therefore, the Bible permits us to call Jesus ‘our God,’ in imitation of Thomas’ exclamation, “My God!” then we should do so, too, and do so with joy knowing that it is to “the glory of God the Father.”

⁸⁷ See Chapter 6 for a discussion of Jesus’ resurrection body.

But is “my God” in John 20:28 meant for Jesus? There is no doubt “my God” is “said to him,” that is, ‘to Jesus,’ because the text says, “In answer Thomas said *to him*,” as Thomas is responding to Jesus who is before him. Though it is common to find the Greek article when “a substantive in the Nominative case is used in a vocative [direct address] sense and followed by a possessive [‘my’],”⁸⁸ it may be that Thomas never intended to call Jesus “God” in John 20:28. It is possible Thomas instead directed his exclamation to *both* Jesus and the Father, since the latter was directly responsible for the resurrection of Jesus which Thomas had previously doubted (compare Galatians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Hebrews 13:20). There are at least two ways the grammar of John 20:28 supports this alternative understanding of Thomas’ words.

In the Second Edition of this book I presented an excursus on “The Significance of Article-Noun-Καί-Noun Constructions in Passages Relating to the Divinity of Christ.”⁸⁹ This type of Greek grammatical construction has the syntactical pattern article-noun-καί[Greek for “and”]-noun. Examples of this construction can be seen in Titus 2:13 and in 2 Peter 1:1.⁹⁰ Trinitarians argue that this syntax means that the nouns in these texts should be applied to one “person” of the Trinity, but not to the Trinity (their “one God”) itself. Trinitarians will also argue at times that if two beings were in view then the Greek article would have been repeated before the second of the two καί-joined nouns.⁹¹

While I believe I have provided good reasons showing that the Trinitarian use of NT texts involving Sharp’s rule is flawed in several respects, what some Trinitarians claim would separate two personal nouns in the Sharp’s rule texts (again, the repetition of the

⁸⁸ C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), pages 116-117.

⁸⁹ See my Second Edition’s Excursus on Sharp’s rule available online through my Blog article, “Granville ‘Sharp’s Rule,’ the “‘Sharper’ Rule,’ and the “‘Sharpest’ Rule”” *Watching the Ministry* (July 27, 2010).

⁹⁰ See *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, pages 388-405.

⁹¹ For example, Robert Morey, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Word Publishing, 1996), page 354, inaccurately writes the following regarding 2Pe 1:1, “If Peter *wanted* to indicate that two persons were in view in II Peter 1:1, all he had to do was to add the article before the second noun.” But adding the article before the second noun in this type of construction would not necessarily have indicated that “two persons were in view” (see the texts listed in note 92).

article before two καί-joined nouns) is found in the grammar of John 20:28! Since the Greek article is repeated before the two καί-joined nouns in John 20:28, from a grammatical standpoint the use of the article before both “Lord” and “God” in John 20:28 could very well be intended to apply the nouns to different persons.

Other NT texts display this same syntactical pattern with two καί-joined, “Sharp’s rule” nouns, but where the article is repeated before both nouns as they apply to different persons. For example, consider the nouns in Revelation 20:6 (Greek: τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *tou theou kai tou christou*, “of God and of the Christ”), which here apply to two persons, “God” and “Christ.” However, other examples in the NT with this same grammatical pattern do not separate the nouns.⁹²

Again, there is no question that Thomas was speaking “to him” (εἶπεν αὐτῷ, *eipen auto*), that is, to Jesus in John 20:28. After Thomas saw the physical evidence of Jesus’ execution, then Thomas believed. But were *both* references (“my Lord” *and* “my God”) meant for Jesus, or only spoken to him as God’s Son? This is a legitimate question because the syntax used allows for Thomas’ words to be applied to Jesus or to Jesus and to God the Father, who is also mentioned in the context by Jesus himself as ‘our God’ (John 20:17), using the same words Thomas uses, “my God”! Margaret Davies writes the following regarding the context of John 20:28:

Naturally, the interpretation of Thomas’s words was hotly debated by early church theologians who wanted to use it in support of their own christological definitions. Those who understood ‘My Lord’ to refer to Jesus, and ‘my God’ to refer to God [the Father] were suspected of christological heresy in the fifth century CE. Many modern commentators have also rejected that interpretation and instead they understand the confession as an assertion that Jesus is both Lord and God. In doing so they are forced to interpret ‘God’ as a reference to λόγος [*logos*]. But it is perfectly appropriate for Thomas to respond to Jesus’ resurrection with a confession of faith both

⁹² See Matt 22:32 (but compare Lu 20:37 where in the same descriptive reference the article is found only before the first noun); Joh 13:13; Rev 1:5, 17; 2:8, 26; 12:9.

in Jesus as his Lord and in God who sent and raised Jesus. Interpreting the confession in this way actually makes much better sense in the context of the Fourth Gospel. In 14.1 belief both in God and in Jesus is encouraged, in a context in which Thomas is particularly singled out. ... If we understand Thomas's confession as an assertion that Jesus is God, this confession in 20.31 becomes an anti-climax.⁹³

Thomas' response to Jesus was after his newfound conviction that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead by God. As Davies notes above, it would therefore not be out of place for Thomas to offer an exclamation of praise to the Father as "Lord" and "God," or to Jesus as "Lord" and to the Father as "God." Another important grammatical fact that seems to support the latter conclusion (that Thomas speaks "to" Jesus but *about* God the Father) is the particular form of the word for "Lord" used.

In John 20:28 Thomas' words are not recorded with "Lord" in its typical vocative (grammatical case of direct address) form κύριε (*kyrie*). Rather, the nominative form (κύριος, *kyrios*) is used. Those who have studied some things about ancient Greek are likely to respond quickly by pointing out that many words lost their vocative form to the nominative by the time the NT was written. That is true, for the most part. But "Lord" retained its vocative form in classical Greek, in the LXX, in the NT, and in the papyri, with barely a handful of cases where *ho kyrios* is used as a vocative.⁹⁴ That is why Edwin Abbott writes:

The Egyptian Papyri use κύριε freely, but never, so far as alleged, ὁ κύριος vocatively. Thus, a great mass of evidence from all extant Greek [shows] that, had the vocative been

⁹³ Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 69; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), pages 125-126.

⁹⁴ It was from the research of Jehovah's Witness David D. Schuman that I first considered this issue of the vocative *kyrie* versus the use of the nominative *kyrios*, which is discussed in detail in his unpublished monograph, *Did the Apostle Thomas Call Jesus "God" at John 20:28?* However, Schuman does not consider the frequency with which *kyrie* is used with a possessive in his study. In the LXX it is found in Jg 4:18 (some manuscripts, including B, use *kyrie mou* in 6:13, 15, 22); 1Sa (1Ki in LXX) 25:24; 2Sa (2Ki in LXX) 7:18, 19 (twice), 20, 22, 25, 28, 29; 14:9, 19, 22; 16:4; 19:27; 1Ki (3Ki in LXX) 1:13, 17, 18, 20, 24; 2:38; 18:7; 2Ki (4Ki in LXX) 4:16; 6:12. In the NT the only occurrence of *kyrie* with a possessive is in Rev 7:14.

intended [in John 20:28], κύριε would have been employed. This is confirmed by the Latin versions, which have ‘dominus.’⁹⁵

The only example from the LXX which has *kyrios* used as a vocative is in Psalm 35(34):23, where Jah is addressed with the words ὁ θεός μου καὶ ὁ κύριός μου (*ho theos mou kai ho kyrios mou*, “my God and my Lord”). But here “God” *precedes* “Lord.” This is the opposite of what we have in John 20:28 and it happens to be significant in explaining why the nominative is used here as a vocative. Abbott explains: “[‘Lord’ in Psalm 35:23(34:23)], as it follows the nominative form of the vocative, ὁ θεός μου, it is rendered for conformity ὁ κύριός μου. In Jn [20:28], ὁ κύριος precedes ὁ θεός.”⁹⁶ So even the one example in the LXX where we have the nominative form *kyrios* used as a vocative, there is a good reason for its use as such there, but that good reason does not apply to the use of *kyrios* in John 20:28.

From this it should not be understood that because Abbott did not believe “Lord” in John 20:28 is used as a vocative that he did not believe Thomas conferred upon Jesus the titles “Lord” and “God.” Abbott did believe Thomas’ Lord “has become to him one with his God, so that [Thomas] may say, ‘My Lord is also my God.’”⁹⁷ But Abbott did recognize the unique features of this Greek text in a way that it is consistent with what I have here presented.

Harris is also aware of the issues surrounding the use of *kyrios* in John 20:28. He argues *ho kyrios* may be considered a nominative of address in Johannine usage in view of what appears to be similar uses of *kyrios* in John 13:13 (ὁμοῖς φωνεῖτέ με Ὁ διδάσκαλος καὶ Ὁ κύριος, *humeis phoneite me Ho didaskalos kai Ho kyrios*, “You address me as, ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’”) and in Revelation 4:11 (ἄξιός ἐστι, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεός

⁹⁵ E. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), page 94, sec. 2049.

⁹⁶ Abbott, *Johannine Grammar*, page 93, sec. 2049, note 2 (emphasis added).

⁹⁷ Abbott, *Johannine Grammar*, page 94, sec. 2050. Compare F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), page 394, who though writing, “The words [‘My Lord and my God’] are to be construed as nominative, *not vocative*” (emphasis added), nonetheless believes Thomas is affirming Jesus’ deity in Joh 20:28.

ἡμῶν, *axios ei, ho kyrios kai ho theos hemon*, “You are worthy, Lord, even our God”).

While *kyrios* in Revelation 4:11 may be an instance of a nominative for a vocative,⁹⁸ *kyrios* in John 13:13 might be a nominative of appellation⁹⁹ rather than a nominative used as a vocative, similar to *Apollyon* (Greek: Ἀπολλύων [“Destroyer”]) in Revelation 9:11. There is no evidence to support the idea that *ho kyrios* is somehow more at home in John 20:28 than is *kyrie* because the latter is occasionally used in the polite form of address, “Sir.”¹⁰⁰ Whether used in this way or as a form of direct address with a stronger meaning, *kyrie* can carry the appropriate weight in a context such as John 20:28, just as it does in Luke 10:21 and in Acts 7:59.

Though Jehovah's Witnesses recognize that some do not believe Thomas calls Jesus “God” in John 20:28, the publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society do not deny that Jesus is ‘our God’ according to this text.¹⁰¹ Further, there is no reason why Christians should refrain from calling Jesus ‘our God’ according to the concepts of God and of his “S/sons” taught in the Bible. At times, the Bible refers to angels as “God” when they stand in his place and on his behalf (see Genesis 18:1-5; Judges 13:9, 19-22). These “sons of God” at times even speak as if they are Jah God (Exodus 3:2-5; Acts 7:30, 38).¹⁰² So there is nothing out of place, biblically, with understanding John 20:28 similarly.

⁹⁸ But even here we find the variant *kyrie* in some witnesses, including \aleph , which reads *kyrie ho kyrios*. In Rev 4:11 we find the possessive *hemon* (“our”) used only once, with *theos*. But Joh 20:28 uses a possessive with both *kyrios* and with *theos*. Compare 2Th 2:16 as it reads in $\aleph^* D^2 F G$ (see also my excursus on Sharp's rule in my *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, page 384, note 56).

⁹⁹ Which means that the nominative form serves as the naming case regardless of how the noun is used in the sentence.

¹⁰⁰ Harris, *Jesus as God*, page 108.

¹⁰¹ *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), page 55, says: “Some scholars have viewed this expression as an exclamation of astonishment spoken to Jesus but actually directed to God, his Father.” Compare H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Early Church Fathers*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), page 181 who wrote, “this exclamation may have been addressed by Thomas not to Jesus but to God.”

¹⁰² See “Has Anyone Seen God?” *The Watchtower*, May 15, 1988, pages 21-23.

Inconsistencies in NWT’s translation of theos? It should be apparent from the discussion so far in this chapter that in the NT the Greek word for “G-god” is translated differently, depending on the subject and on the context. This is similar to other words that have an exclusive sense in the Bible, as well as other senses that when applied to others do not compromise the unique understanding the word has for the one, particular subject (for example, see the use of “F/father” in John 8:39-41, discussed in Chapter 2, pages 184-185). With this usage of terms in mind, it is truly remarkable to find scholars like Dr. Robert Countess criticizing the NWT for not translating *theos* the same way in each instance. Countess writes:

The first section of John—1:1-18—furnishes a lucid example of NWT arbitrary dogmatism. Θεός occurs eight times—verses 1, 2, 6, 12, 13, 18—and has the article only twice—verses 1, 2. Yet NWT six times translated “God,” once “a god,” and once “the god.”¹⁰³

Countess’ criticism of the NWT and of the 1950 Appendix to John 1:1c as it relates to the anarthrous *theos* does not show an accurate understanding of the NWT’s avowed principle of literal translation. Should we criticize the NWT for translating the vocative Κύριοι (*Kyrioi*) as “Sirs” (Acts 16:30) because this polite, ordinary form of address does not agree with the NWT’s use elsewhere of the English “Lord” (Master), which we see as an articulated, exalted title in John 13:13, 14 (NWT)?

True, literal translation to some extent seeks to standardize the vocabulary in the target language, but not at the expense of *meaning*. This is the fundamental flaw Countess makes in his attack against the NWT. A translator must be sensitive to the context in which a word is used, and in the case of John 1:1 *theos* is provided a context unlike any other in the NT, with one *theos* described as existing with another who is *ho theos*. The unique context for each use of *theos* must be carefully considered.

¹⁰³ Countess, *The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New Testament*, page 55.

Given that Countess authored his analysis before the release of the NWT Reference Bible (1984), it is not as surprising to find he did not consider the full range of issues related to Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of *theos* in John 1:1c as it is to see other, more recent scholars follow him! Indeed, Dan Wallace cites Countess' charge of inconsistency on the part of the NWT towards *theos*, but Wallace offers a further critique of other anarthrous terms in the Johannine Prologue in the NWT, which are also not translated with an indefinite article. For example, Wallace says that the NWT is inconsistent for not rendering "beginning" (1:1, 2), "life" (1:4), "from God" (1:6), "John" (1:6), and other terms with the English indefinite article.¹⁰⁴ But Wallace's argument does not show any familiarity with the 1984 Reference Bible's Appendix to John 1:1, and Wallace also misses the point of the 1950 NWT Appendix to John 1:1.

Even though the authors of the 1950 NWT Appendix did not have the advantage of considering Harner's and Dixon's studies concerning anarthrous preverbal nominatives, they did not translate *theos* as "a god" in John 1:1c "on the simplistic grounds that it lacks the article."¹⁰⁵ Its citations of three grammars and especially footnote "b" in the 1950 Appendix show the NWT Committee was here (primarily) discussing the translation of anarthrous predicate nominatives.¹⁰⁶ So most of Countess' and Wallace's examples are not very relevant to the discussion. Also, nowhere in the 1950 Appendix do we read that *all* anarthrous constructions are qualitative or should be translated with an indefinite article. The NWT Committee clearly did not believe this was the case, as their translation repeatedly reveals (see Wallace's examples, cited above).

We should all be prepared to accept some degree of ambiguity when it comes to what the 1950 NWT Committee believed constituted a qualitative or an indefinite noun, since the Committee does parallel *theos* in Acts 28:6 with *theos* in John

¹⁰⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, page 267.

¹⁰⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, page 267

¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in footnote "b" they list 20 anarthrous predicate nominatives (Joh 4:19; 6:70; 9:5, 24, 25, 28; 10:12 [*sic*—10:13], 33, 36; 11:49, 51; 12:6; 17:17; 18:37 [twice], 19:21), 16 of which *precede* the verb or participle, as in Joh 1:1.

1:1c, and this is not a strict grammatical parallel. But the 1984 Appendix leaves no room for doubt, as it relies heavily on Harner’s analysis in arguing that *theos* in John 1:1c is primarily qualitative.

Additionally, none of the examples given by Countess or by Wallace have a context in which *theos* is used of two individuals who are said to be “with” one another, and where the first *theos* is articulated and the second is an anarthrous preverbal nominative. This makes John 1:1 unique in terms of its presentation of two beings, both of whom are identified and distinguished by means of *theos*. A good translation should capture this same description of and distinction between the two beings.

The truth about “the only true God.” Jehovah’s Witnesses believe the Bible presents us with a monotheistic view of God, in that the Father is the only one who is God in the *absolute* (non-derived) sense. The Father is the “only true God,” as Jesus said (John 17:3). This description, “true God,” is used only three times in the NT. In all three of these texts Jesus is distinguished from the true God or from “the true one.” In John 17:3 Jesus prays to “the only true God.” In 1 Thessalonians 1:9 we are told to “slave for a living and true God,” who is then distinguished from “his Son” (verse 10) “whom he raised up from the dead.”

Finally, in 1 John 5:20 the true God is distinguished from “his Son Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁷ These references are significant because, like “one God” in 1 Corinthians 8:6, they restrict the description “true God” to the Father in such a way that he is clearly distinct from others who may be considered “gods” in the Bible. Jesus makes this restriction on “true God” explicit in John 17:3 by means of the Greek word for “only” (Greek: *monos*).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ See the excursus on Sharp’s rule in my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, pages 405–408, for my discussion of the translation of 1Jo 5:20.

¹⁰⁸ While in certain contexts the word “only” might not mean *only* in an absolute sense, there is no indication that we have such a use here in Joh 17:3. Also, there is no example that I am aware of where the person who makes the assertion that another person is the “only” one of something means to also include him- or herself in that which he reserves for another.—Compare Mr 13:32.

Still, Rhodes believes the following questions are relevant for asking Witnesses: "Is Jesus a true God or a false god? If Jesus is a true god, then this forces the Jehovah's Witness to believe in more than one true God (which is polytheism). If Jesus is not such a true God, then He must be a false god."¹⁰⁹

Though the Father is the "only true God" according to Jesus in John 17:3, Jesus and God's other "sons" can be this "true God" even as they are "God" or Jah himself to us through their role in God's purpose (compare John 14:10). But God's "S/sons" are not the "true God," "God," or Jah according to their own will, as I explained in Chapter 2 and in the introduction to this chapter. Biblically, others can be considered "the true God" where and when they act exclusively on the Father's behalf to further his will, not their own, to the Father's glory. There is no threat whatsoever in this to the Father as the "one God." In fact, I feel pretty comfortable in saying that such total devotion and dedication by his "S/sons," in furtherance of his Godship, makes Jah God rejoice with pleasure!

Rhodes' reasoning is also misleading in that it assumes "true" (as used by Jesus in John 17:3) has the meaning of "right" or "correct," with its opposite meaning being "false" or "wrong." But there are good reasons for believing what Jesus said about his Father being "the only true God" has nothing to do with Rhodes' understanding of "true." Before considering the biblical meaning of the word translated "true" in John 17:3, it should be noted that Trinitarians are not really in a position to ask the kind of question Rhodes asks, namely, "Is Jesus a true God or a false god?"

Indeed, they put themselves in a very precarious position because they do not recognize the scriptural teaching that Jah's "S/sons" can rightly be considered "gods." Since Jesus himself says that the Father is "the only true God," then Trinitarians would have to conclude that Jesus is a false god. Of course, they do not conclude any such thing. Instead they assume Trinitarianism and then they are able to turn the biblical Father from the "only true God" to a "person" of the true God, which "God" then becomes the very thing assumed in the first place: the Trinity!

¹⁰⁹ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, pages 227-228.

In light of John 17:3, the questions Trinitarians should ask, indeed, that we should all ask are: 1) *Since* the Father is “the only true God,” what kind of “G-god” is Jesus? or 2) *Since* the Father is “the only true God,” in what sense can Jesus and God’s other “sons” be ‘true G-gods’? To this point I have already presented much information about how the “one God’s” “S/sons” are “gods.” But more about these “S/sons” relationship to God as “gods” can be learned from the Greek word “true” used in John 17:3, namely, *alethinos* (Greek: ἀληθινός). This word can have one of several meanings depending on the context and the usage of the author in question. According to BAGD, *alethinos* can mean, “genuine, real ... Of God in contrast to other gods, who are not real ... true in the sense of the reality possessed only by the archetype, not by its copies.”

Though BAGD does not attribute the ‘archetypal’ meaning to *alethinos* in John 17:3, I believe this sense best fits the use of “true” in this account because it reflects what is accurately taught in the Bible about the “one God” and about his “sons.” Arguing as Trinitarians sometimes argue, namely, that “true” as used of the Father in John 17:3 means all other real “gods” must be “false,” both contradicts what the Bible teaches about God’s “sons” and it also would have to mean Jesus is a false “G-god,” which like the Trinity is not taught anywhere in the Bible. On the other hand, Jesus is explicitly said to be a “copy” of God’s “being” (Hebrews 1:3), which fits perfectly with the definitions “archetype” and “copy” that are given for *alethinos* in BAGD.

To illustrate the meaning of a “reality possessed only by the archetype, not by its copies” for “true” in texts other than John 17:3, consider John 1:9. Here John says concerning Jesus, “The true light [Greek: τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, *to phos to alethinon*] that gives light to every sort of man was about to come into the world” (compare 1 John 2:8). Clearly, this does not require that we understand Jesus’ disciples (Matthew 5:14) as “false” lights! Rather, the disciples are presented in the Bible as “lights” that reflect Jesus’ light by their devotion to him. Similarly, Jesus is a “reflection of God’s glory” and as such he remains completely devoted to his God.—Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 3:12.

Consider also the account where Jesus, “the true bread from heaven [Greek: τὸν ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὸν ἀληθινόν, *ton arton ek tou ouranou ton alethinon*],” contrasted himself with the manna that God gave the Israelites (John 6:32-33). Obviously, the manna was real food. But Jesus was the *true* food, the greater manna from heaven that would give life everlasting to those who eat it (John 6:51, 54-56). The manna and other earthly foods are only copies of the real, true food that God gives. Note also how in Hebrews 8:2 the “true tent” (Greek: τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς, *tes skenes tes alethines*) is compared with the typical tent God commanded Moses to make (Hebrews 8:5; 9:9). Moses’ tent was not a “false” tent, but a copy of the heavenly one.

In all these texts *alethinos* is not contrasted with something that is “false.” Instead it is used to describe that which is the archetype in comparison to what is a copy of the original. Origen (c.185—c.253 CE) apparently understood this use of *alethinos* in John 17:3, for in his *Commentary on John* he wrote:

God on the one hand is Very God (Autotheos, God of Himself); and so the Savior says in His prayer to the Father, “That they may know Thee the only true God;” but that all beyond the Very God is made God by participation in His divinity, and is not to be called simply God (with the article), but rather God (without the article). And thus the first-born of all creation, who is the first to be with God, and to attract to Himself divinity, is a being of more exalted rank than the other gods beside Him, of whom God is the God, as it is written, “The God of gods, the Lord [Jehovah], hath spoken and called the earth.” [Ps. 136:2] It was by the offices of the first-born that they became gods, for they drew from God in generous measure that they should be made gods, and He communicated it to them according to His own bounty. The true God, then, is “The God,” and those who are formed after him are gods, images, as it were, of Him the prototype.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ ANF 10, Book 2, page 323 (underlining added). Another early reference to the use of the article with *theos* is found in the works of Philo (an Alexandrian Jew who died around 50 CE). In his work *On Dreams* 1.39.229, Philo argues, “Accordingly the holy word in the present instance [that is, in the LXX of Gen 31:13] has indicated Him Who is truly God by means of the articles saying ‘I am the God,’ while it omits the article when mentioning him who is improperly so called, saying ‘Who appeared to thee in the place of

The “only true God” according to Origen is “God of Himself,” not because of someone else. Further, Origen also picked up on the distinction between *the* God and a god, in that “the only true God” is *the* God of John 1:1 while the Word “and those who are formed after [*the* God] are gods, images, as it were, of Him the prototype.”¹¹¹

The teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses that the Father is “the only true God” and that his “sons” are “gods,” and even “God” or ‘our God’ in that they express his will in place of their own, is biblical. Redefining the “one God” as a Trinity of “persons” or calling Jesus “my God” only insofar as Jesus is a “person” of this triune God has nothing to do with the Bible and its teachings about God and his “S/sons.” The Trinity is certainly not what Thomas had in mind when he spoke to Jesus and acknowledged that he, or he and his Father, are ‘his God and his Lord’!

Chapter Summary

The Johannine Logos is presented to us against the backdrop of biblical and other Wisdom traditions that tell us about a being who was with God prior to the creation of the physical universe. This one was God’s first and greatest creation, for he was an exact “copy of his very being” (Hebrews 1:3). Indeed, John himself communicates in plain language that this one, the Logos, was “with God” in the “beginning” when the heavens and the earth were made. It was “through” the Logos God made the universe, even “all things” in it.

This “only-begotten god” reflects the glory of God and has “explained” the one whom no man has seen (John 1:18). The Logos even “became flesh” and gave up his life to his God for him and for us (John 1:14, 16-17; Philippians 2:5-11). The

God” (the translation is from F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, *Philo*, vol. 5 [Loeb Classical Library: Harvard University Press, 1934], pages 418-419). But the value of this reference is limited. See Colson and Whitaker’s note *a* on page 418, and also their Appendix sec. 230 on pages 604-605 of their volume.

¹¹¹ Compare Origen’s statement, “Nor must we omit to mention the Word, who is God *after* [ἐξῆς, *hexes*] the Father of all” (ANF 10, Book 2, page 303 [emphasis added]).

concepts associated with *logos* in John's day were many, and he seems to have deliberately chosen this term as a compliment to "Wisdom" and to help attract the interest of those still adhering to various Greek, Jewish, and other philosophies that included a concept of *logos*. In the Bible, the *logos* is presented as another "name" for Jesus (Revelation 19:13). As the *logos*, he was also *theos* according to John 1:1c. The translation of *theos* in this text as "a god" in the NWT has been grossly over-criticized by many, particularly by those who have "a Jesus other than the one" presented in the Bible.—2 Corinthians 11:4.

When it comes to translating John 1:1c, perhaps the best way to do so is with, "the Word was with God, and the Word was a divine being." This would give some emphasis to the position of the noun *theos* in 1:1c, since it is fronted or placed before the verb apparently for this reason (see note 57, and the references to Cervin's thesis). But there are no good reasons for understanding the syntax of John 1:1c as meaning that the Word is *theos* only by sharing the nature of a triune *theos*. That is not how the Bible speaks about "G-god," and nowhere in the Bible are the words for "G-god" used in reference to a Trinity or for a "person" of the Trinity. Therefore, to suggest that either sense is how the word for "G-god" is used in John 1:1 begs the question by assuming what is not yet proven. As noted previously, this is precisely what Trinitarians do whenever they must interpret a biblical reference to the true "G-god."

It is *the Father*, Jah God (Micah 5:4; John 8:54), who has "committed all judging to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (John 5:22-23). It is *the Father* who begat his Son, "his Firstborn," as "the exact representation of his very being" who does "only what he beholds the Father doing" (John 3:16; 5:19; Hebrews 1:3, 6). It is *the Father* who "gave [Jesus] the name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). It is *the Father* who in Jesus is "doing *his* works" (John 14:10). It is *the Father*, Jah God Almighty, who gave Jesus "authority over nations" and who permitted his Son to 'sit down with his Father on his throne' (Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21). *The Father* is the "only true God."—John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6.

The five lines of evidence presented by Bowman and Komoszewski in their “case for the deity of Christ” chapter are not presented in the light of the biblical understanding of God as the ultimate determiner of all things, or in the biblical context of Jah God having divine “S/sons,” one of whom is his “only-begotten.” Yet, biblically all of these “S/sons” are “gods” by their existence (as spirit beings), their God-given authority, and by their representation of the Father as “the only true God” (John 17:3).¹¹² Still, no matter how privileged any of God’s “sons” are because of these distinctions, only one of them has the right to be called “only-begotten” and “Firstborn (John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:6). In the next chapter, I will continue my discussion and defense of this special Son of God, as it relates to the Bible and to the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

¹¹² Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, pages 267-268.

5

Jah's "Firstborn"

When a human is born his or her life on earth begins. Before birth, the human child is alive in his or her mother, but not "on earth," not in the sense in which we begin to count or measure the human's life in days, months, and years. Before birth, the life of a human is usually measured in the number of calendar "months" since conception is believed to have occurred. In both cases (born and unborn) we could say the human child is "in time," in that the start of the child's life is measurable in relation to other events, actions, or objects which occur or that move and exist at the time the child was conceived, born, or as the child grows.

A human that is alive during a particular day, month, or year, or even during an hour, minute, or a second, is "in time" because such periods are measurable in relation to other events or objects as they move and exist in predictable or measurable relation to each other.¹ My view of "time" as a measurement of events, actions, thoughts, or objects which move, exist, or otherwise occur in relation to other events, actions, thoughts, or objects, is based on how we humans actually view and use "time" in our everyday lives.

But is this view of "time," based on our experience, consistent with what the Bible teaches about "time"? Further, what does the Bible teach about what it means to be a "creature" in comparison to God the Father, and in what sense can we differentiate between those creatures who came "out of" the Father with those who came "through" the Son (1 Corinthians 8:6)? Since the Son is the one "through whom" all things came, in what sense is he himself "out of" the Father?

¹ See Chapter 3, note 95, page 268-269. See also my more recent article, "The Intelligence in Life: Intent and 'Time,'" *Watching the Ministry* (February 8, 2010).

In the Bible it is clear that God the Father is without beginning, that there was no start to his life. In Psalm 90:2 Jah God is described as “from time indefinite to time indefinite” (NWT) or “from everlasting to everlasting” (NRSV). Yet, God also relates to time in ways that are beyond and that at the same time include the means of measurement we use for events as they occur in history and over the course of our life. For example, the Bible says that “one day” to God is “as a thousand years” and “a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore, God’s means of measuring life, events, thoughts, or actions as they occur is much greater than our own, but he measures such things nonetheless. Only the “one God” himself is ultimately immeasurable in that he is without a beginning that any being can measure beyond what we are told in texts like Psalm 90:2.

However, the Bible also clearly teaches that Jesus is “the reflection of [God’s] glory and an exact copy of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). The prehuman Jesus is also referred to as God’s “only-begotten,” as his “Son,” and as his “Firstborn” (John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:2, 6). God is “Father” to Jesus and he is Father to us all (Ephesians 4:6 [compare John 20:17]). Indeed, the Bible explicitly teaches that Jesus was ‘given life’ from God and that he ‘lives because of the Father’ (John 5:26; 6:57). With such clear temporal descriptions given for the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Bible, one might wonder just why is there such great controversy over whether the prehuman Jesus, the Word, was Jah God’s first creation or his “firstborn” Son?

Trinitarians believe it is a dishonor to refer to the prehuman Jesus as a creature, even as the “firstborn” in any sense that involves a start to his heavenly life “with God” (John 1:1). But since the Bible clearly does refer to Jesus as God’s “Firstborn” and as the “firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6), why do Trinitarians so often criticize Jehovah’s Witnesses for believing that the Son was created first, and in a unique sense, by God the Father? Why is a Jesus who was God’s first and greatest creation, his “exact copy” (Hebrews 1:3), not acceptable to Trinitarians, and are Jehovah’s Witnesses correct in identifying the prehuman Jesus as the true “Firstborn” of God Almighty?

In Chapter 4 I addressed several issues related to the biblical teaching about Jesus' preexistence, showing how he is "a god" and even 'our God' according to the Bible. In this chapter I will defend the belief of Jehovah's Witnesses that the prehuman Jesus was indeed God's first creation, even his first and most beloved Son. The importance of this dispute can be seen in the reaction by some Trinitarian scholars and critics to Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs. For example, Trinitarian apologist Ron Rhodes claims that if Jesus was created before he was born as a man, then "the Father Himself is guilty of committing a horrible sin" because he commanded "the angels to commit a sacrilegious act by worshiping (*proskuneo*) a mere creature."² This is misrepresentation of Jehovah's Witnesses' view of Jesus.

Rhodes' characterization of Jehovah's Witnesses' belief about Jesus being "mere creature" is incorrect and misleading. Accepting Jesus as God's real "firstborn" in and of itself shows that he is the *most special* creation of God, "because that one is the beginning of his generative power" (Deuteronomy 21:17). Further, believing that Jesus is an "exact copy" (Hebrews 1:3) of God's being hardly means that the prehuman Jesus is a "mere creature"! Yet, that is how Rhodes has presented our beliefs to thousands if not millions of his readers and listeners. Then there is Rhodes' allegation that our beliefs amount to a "sacrilegious act" involving worship of "a mere creature"! Rhodes and other Trinitarians have not only misrepresented the biblical teaching about Jesus as God's "Firstborn," but they also object to God's *permission*, even to his command, that we honor his Son by giving him the kind of "worship" described in the Bible for those who do all things for "the glory of God the Father."—Philippians 2:9-11.

Using Rhodes' logic, one could argue that Jesus was "guilty of committing a horrible sin" because he commanded that his followers in the first-century congregation of Philadelphia be given *proskuneo* by the Jews "of the synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 3:9)! Just as the Father considered *proskuneo* appropriate for his Son in Hebrews 1:6, so Jesus saw no compromise with God's commands in allowing

² Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1993), page 170.

proskyneo to be given to his disciples in Philadelphia. But how can God be the true object of our worship and at times permit some of his creatures to be similarly given “worship”? In this chapter I will consider this question first, and then present and defend the biblical teaching concerning God’s Firstborn, showing that he is indeed the first and most glorious creation of the Father, as Jehovah’s Witnesses teach.

The “Worship” of Jah’s Firstborn

The NWT’s use of “worship” in reference to Jesus.

According to a number of translations of Hebrews 1:6, God commands all of the angels to “worship” his “Firstborn,” Jesus. The word here translated “worship” is the Greek word προσκυνέω (*proskyneo*). Rhodes writes the following in criticism of the NWT: “In Hebrews 1:6, we are told that Christ is worshipped (*proskuneo*) by the angels. But in the *New World Translation*, this superiority is obscured because of the way the Watchtower has butchered this verse.”³ Because the NWT translated *proskyneo* as “obeisance” in Hebrews 1:6 rather than as “worship,” Rhodes characterizes the NWT as having “butchered this verse.” What Rhodes fails to tell his readers is that the NWT rendering is both consistent with other Bible translations and with the definitions given for *proskyneo* in numerous New Testament (NT) Greek dictionaries.

For example, in the *New English Bible* Hebrews 1:6 reads, “Let all the angels of God pay him homage.” Consider also the readings found in the *Twentieth Century New Testament* (“Let all the angels of God bow before him”), Robert Young’s translation (“And let them bow before him—all messengers of God”), and Goodspeed’s translation (“And let all God’s angels bow before him”). Did these translations ‘butcher’ Hebrews 1:6? According to BAGD (page 716) *proskyneo* has the following meanings, “(fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully.” So Bible translators must carefully consider the context and the person to whom *proskyneo* is being giving,

³ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 171.

before attempting to provide the right meaning of a particular word in a certain context.

In the case of Hebrews 1:6, as with Revelation 3:9, the one who is given *proskyneo* receives it *because of someone else*. In Hebrews 1:6 God's "Firstborn" is allowed to receive *proskyneo* from the "angels," and in Revelation 3:9 Jesus' followers are similarly permitted to receive "worship" or "obeisance" from those Jews who have not served Jesus. But while in some more recent editions of the NWT (for example, in the 1984 edition) *proskyneo* in Hebrews 1:6 is translated as "obeisance," earlier editions (for example, the 1950-1951, 1961 editions and the 1969 Kingdom Interlinear Translation [KIT]) translated *proskyneo* as "worship." So the NWT translators and the NWT's publisher (the Watchtower Society) clearly were not afraid of using "worship" for Jesus according to the biblical use and understanding of the word.

Indeed, the Watchtower Society's 1945 "Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation" says the Society's purposes include acting "as the servant of and the legal world-wide agency for that body of persons known as Jehovah's Witnesses ... and for public Christian worship of Almighty God and Christ Jesus."⁴ So Jehovah's Witnesses are not opposed to 'worshipping' Jesus in the sense in which this can rightly be done without compromising the unique devotion due to the Father as the "one God." However, because the use of "worship" for anyone but God can be misleading without the proper context, the NWT eventually changed "worship" to "obeisance" in Hebrews 1:6 and the Society even withheld the part about "worship of ... Christ Jesus" from quotations of their 1945 "Articles of Amendment."⁵

⁴ Article 7.2 of the Society's "Articles of Amendment," January, 1945, filed in the court of Allegheny in the State of Pennsylvania.

⁵ In the 1969 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* published by the Watchtower Society, on page 50 the part quoted above from the 1945 "Articles of Amendment" is quoted again with modification, namely, "and for public Christian worship of Almighty God ..." The reference to "and Christ Jesus" is left out. It would have looked better for the Society to simply quote the 1945 "Amendment" in full on this point and then explain the sense in which Jesus can rightly be 'worshipped,' as they have done elsewhere. See, for example, "What Do the Scriptures Say About 'the Divinity of Christ'?" *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1992, page 23 (box), where it states in part that the worship God's Son receives "is relative and is directed through him to Jehovah."

The “worship” Jah permits others to receive. But to what extent can or should we give Jesus, or any other creature whom God approves, “worship” in a biblical sense? Recall the wording of Hebrews 1:6, “*let all God’s angels do obeisance to/worship him*” (emphasis added). The fact that God ‘lets,’ ‘commands,’ or “told [his angels] to worship Jesus” is not lost on Bowman and Komoszewski.⁶ But they do not develop this point nor do they see its significance in relation to how the “worship” of Jesus in a relative sense is appropriate *if* God permits it.

In the Bible, the worship of Jesus is nowhere said to have anything to do with his being a “person” of the Trinity. But the Bible does provide us with numerous instances where Jah permits the “worship” of certain humans, even in the same context, by the same people, and at the same time that he himself is being worshipped. For example, consider 1 Chronicles 29:20 according to the NIV: “Then David said to the whole assembly, ‘Praise the LORD your God.’ So they all praised the LORD, the God of their fathers; *they bowed low and fell prostrate before the LORD and the king*” (emphasis added).

In the LXX of this account both king David and Jah God are given *proskyneo* by the same people at the same time. David did not reject such “worship” here and instead direct it all to God, perhaps because he understood that it was due to his position as God’s royal representative, and because Jah allowed it. As great as this honor was for David, Jah permitted even greater glory and honor be given to David’s son Solomon:

And Solomon began to sit upon Jehovah’s throne as king in place of David his father and to make a success of it, and all the Israelites were obedient to him. As for all the princes and the mighty men and also all the sons of King David, they submitted themselves to Solomon the king. And Jehovah continued to make Solomon surpassingly great before the eyes of all Israel and to put upon him such royal dignity as had not come to be upon any king before him over Israel [1 Chronicles 29:23-25, NWT, underlining added].

⁶ Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), page 40.

Jah gave Solomon greater "royal majesty" (NASB) than any king who preceded him, even more than he gave his father David, and yet David was "worshipped" in a sense permissible only by God (1Ch 29:20). Solomon enjoyed the obedience of his subjects because he sat on "Jehovah's throne." Similarly, "the Word" (John 1:14, 18; Revelation 19:13) is "worthy" to receive honor, glory, and even worship in a biblical sense as Jah's agent, more so than either Solomon or David, for as God's Son he "became obedient as far as death" and "was slaughtered" (Philippians 2:8-9; Revelation 5:9). Yet, Jesus himself reserved the highest form of worship for his God and Father, when he told Satan, "It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render *sacred service* [Greek: λατρεύω, *latreuo*]."—Matthew 4:10.⁷

On the other hand, Bowman claims that "Jesus also receives ... sacred service (Rev. 22:3)."⁸ But does Revelation 22:3 teach that Jesus receives *latreuo*? The NIV translation of this text reads (with underlining and emphasis added): "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants *will serve* [form of *latreuo*] him." In this verse there are two individuals, "God" and the "Lamb," but in referring to the one who would receive *latreuo* John uses the third person *singular* pronoun ("his," "him"). If John had wanted his readers to believe that both God and the Lamb (Jesus) were to receive *latreuo*, then he could easily have used the third person *plural* pronoun (for example, 'and

⁷ Karen H. Jones, "Distinguishing the Meaning of the Greek Verbs in the Semantic Domain for Worship," *FN* 4 (November 1991), page 185, observes: "In the New Testament λατρεύω [*latreuo*] is used to designate duties performed in a religious vocation. ... As used in the New Testament, the word λατρεύω denotes actions which are always evaluated positively when God is the grammatical object and negatively with reference to any other object (eg, Matt 4:10; Luke 4:7, 8)." It is, however, possible to use *latreuo* for someone other than God but only in furtherance of the worship of the "one God." For example, in "a Christian portion of the *Sibylline Oracle* (8.442-445)" we read that all things in the world "serve" (form of *latreuo*) Adam because he is made in the "form" (*morphe*) of God (D. Steenburg, "The Worship of Adam and Christ as the Image of God," *JSNT* 39 [1990], page 97). This use of *morphe* may have to do with an image Adam was given that permitted "worship" of him similar to how the Son of God is the "image" and "imprint" of God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), and how as such he can be worshipped in "fulfillment of God's victory over idolatry." It is also clear that this "worship" is in both cases "at God's bidding" (Steenburg, "The Worship of Adam and Christ as the Image of God," pages 100, 101), as with Heb 1:6.

⁸ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 109.

their servants will serve *them*') instead of the singular form he chose to use.⁹

If Bowman or anyone would like to argue that *latreuo* here in Revelation 22:3 refers to "the Lamb," then we are justified in asking for the good reasons that restrict the reference here to the Lamb rather than to God, the one to whom *latreuo* is elsewhere restricted. The singular pronominal reference in Revelation 22:3 combined with Jesus' statement in Matthew 4:10, along with other uses of *latreuo* for God as distinct from Jesus in Revelation,¹⁰ support the view that in Revelation 22:3 *latreuo* is meant for God, not the Lamb. Therefore, Revelation 22:3 does not prove "Jesus also receives ... sacred service," as Bowman claims.

In addition to 1 Chronicles 29:20 and Revelation 3:9, there are numerous other texts in the Bible that reveal how Jah permits worship (*proskyneo*) of some of his appointed servants. Consider the following examples of *proskyneo* used for God's servants in the Greek version of the OT (the LXX), with the English from the RSV (with underlining added):

1 Samuel (1 Kings in LXX) 24:8 (24:9)

Afterward David also arose, and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth, and did obeisance [ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, *epi prosopon autou epi ten gen kai prosekynesen auto*; *prosekynesen* is a form of *proskyneo*].

1 Samuel 25:23

When Ab'igail saw David, she made haste, and alighted from the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed to the ground [προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, *prosekynesen auto epi ten gen*].

⁹ Compare Rev 6:16, 17 where the third person plural pronoun is used in reference to God and to the Lamb.

¹⁰ Rev 7:15 speaks of the great crowd that comes out of the tribulation rendering *latreuo* to the "One seated on the throne," referring to God. However, Jesus is clearly distinguished from the One seated on the throne, as he is said to be "in the midst of the throne," according to verse 17.

1 Samuel 25:41

And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground [προσεκύνησεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον, *prosekynesen epi ten gen epi prosopon*], and said, "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord."

2 Samuel 1:2 (2 Kings in the LXX)

And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes rent and earth upon his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and did obeisance [ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, *epesen epi ten gen kai prosekynesen auto*].

2 Samuel 9:6

And Me·phib'ō·sheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance [ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ, *epesen epi prosopon autou kai prosekynesen auto*].

In these and in other biblical texts,¹¹ human servants of God are not simply given *proskyneo* (though that in and of itself is significant). Rather, people 'bow with their face to the earth' and 'fall down' and give them *proskyneo*! But where is the Trinitarian appreciation for such uses of *proskyneo*, that is, relative to how they can be used to understand the kind of "worship" God *permits* or 'commands' be given to his very own Son? Where are the Trinitarians when it comes to explaining the above texts which teach that servants of "one God" can be given *proskyneo* by others, even after 'falling to the ground with their face to the earth'? So far as I can tell, their explanations and any attempts to use such texts as a background for the worship of the Son in the NT are nowhere to be found.

In this light, it is interesting to note that most of the above information about the use of *proskyneo* in the OT LXX and in the NT was presented in the Second Edition of this book.¹² Yet, though

¹¹ See also 2Sa 14:4, 22, 33; 16:4; 18:28; 24:20; 1Ki 1:16, 23; 2Ki 2:15; 4:17; 1Ch 21:21; Isa 60:14; Ru 2:10.

¹² See *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Second Edition (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), pages 205-210.

they refer to my Second Edition on several occasions in their recent work on the subject of the deity of Jesus Christ, Bowman and Komoszewski ignore each and every single one of the texts captioned above in their discussion of the worship of Jesus in the Bible. They thus leave their readers without a complete perspective on the biblical understanding of what it means to 'fall down,' 'bow before,' and *then* give *proskyneo* to someone who is not God himself or even a "person" of the "one God."¹³ Also, though Bowman and Komoszewski ignore my discussion of this subject as presented in my Second Edition, they find occasion for criticizing Jason Beduhn for "taking no notice of Hebrews 1:6!"¹⁴

The Logos and "Time"

"In the beginning." Now that I have given some perspective on "time" and on the biblical teaching about how Christians can properly "worship" God's "Firstborn," it is time to return to the question of whether the Bible does in fact teach that Jesus is the first and most glorious of all of God's creations. First I will show how the Bible presents the Word (*ho logos*) in relation to indicators of time before he "became flesh" (John 1:14). This will provide a basis for further discussion of the role of the Word in creation, and also where it concerns the creation of the Word as God's "Firstborn."

Consider the meaning of the first two clauses of John 1:1, which according to nearly every English translation read, "In the beginning was the Word [clause A], and the Word was with God [clause B]." To one familiar with the opening words of Genesis 1:1, the question of whether the "beginning" here referred to is the same "beginning" mentioned in Genesis 1:1 comes naturally to mind. At one time (as recent as 1993), Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society believed that the "beginning" of John 1:1 referred to the "beginning" of Proverbs 8:22 and Revelation 3:14 (two texts that are discussed later in this chapter), but not to the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1. With

¹³ Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, pages 37-45.

¹⁴ Bowman and Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, page 10.

reference to this connection, one issue of *The Watchtower* had this to say about the "beginning" of John 1:1:

John 1:1-16. Verses 1 and 2 read: "In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. This one was in the beginning with God." Here John calls the prehuman Jesus by the title "Word." This identifies the function he performed as Jehovah God's Spokesman. *And when John states that "in the beginning the Word was," it means that the Word was the beginning of Jehovah's creative works, "the beginning of the creation by God."* (Revelation 3:14)¹⁵

The above understanding is also apparently why the 1984 NWT Reference Bible gives Proverbs 8:22, Colossians 1:15, and Revelation 3:14 as cross-references to the first occurrence of "beginning" in John 1:1. But does this mean Jehovah's Witnesses reject any connection between John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1? According to Robert Bowman, "The JW's resist this conclusion [namely, of equating the 'beginning' of Genesis 1:1 with the 'beginning' of John 1:1] because they wish to deny that the Word existed 'before' the absolute beginning of time, since this would mean that the Word was God."¹⁶

John 1:1 does not say anything about the Logos existing "before" the beginning, and Genesis Chapter 1 does not say anything about "the absolute beginning of time." These are simply Bowman's unfounded interpretations of "beginning" as used in these texts. John 1:1 says that the Logos was "in the beginning," not "before" this "beginning." Genesis 1:1 similarly speaks of what God created "in the beginning" (namely, "the heavens and the earth") which as I will show below has to do with all *physical* creations.

To be the "absolute beginning of time," the "beginning" of John 1:1 would have to involve the very first event, action, or thought that occurred in measurable relation to some other event, action, or

¹⁵ "Follow the Light of the World," *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1993, page 11, par. 14 (emphasis added). See also, *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), pages 52, 94, 1000.

¹⁶ Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), pages 20-21.

thought, namely, the second event, action, or thought, and so on for all things that occur and that at least one being (God) can so measure. Bowman, however, appears to assume a definition for "time" that does not apply to God's actions or thoughts as they occur according to his will. Bowman then puts the Logos outside of "time," even though John 1:1 says that both the Word and God are "in the beginning," which would be "in" the "absolute beginning of time" even for Bowman! But because Bowman also assumes Trinitarianism which teaches that the Logos is eternally God, this is not how he ultimately interprets this text.

"In" which "beginning"? Another fact Bowman ignores is the cross-reference to John 1:2 in the NWT ("This one was in the beginning with God") specifically links the "beginning" of this verse to Genesis 1:1. The word "beginning" is mentioned in nearly all of the cross-references given to the "beginning" of John 1:1, 2, which may suggest the NWT Committee is only providing parallel thoughts and expressions for its readers to use in discerning the meaning of the word "beginning," according to the opening verses of the Prologue. Another understanding of the "beginning" of John 1:1 put forth by the Watchtower Society can be seen in the following:

John 1:1 says that "the Word" (Jesus in his prehuman existence) was with God "in the beginning." *So the Word was with Jehovah when "the heavens and the earth" were created.* God was addressing the Word when He said: "Let us make man in our image." (*Genesis 1:1, 26*)¹⁷

The reason Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society at one time thought John 1:1 was referring to the origin of the Word, is because of the Greek word translated "beginning" in Revelation 3:14 (Greek: ἀρχή, *arche*) and in the LXX of Proverbs 8:22. However, contrary to Bowman's view, the entire context of Genesis Chapter 1 shows that the creation of the *physical universe* is in view, not the

¹⁷ *Knowledge that Leads to Everlasting Life* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1995), page 39 (emphasis added).

creation of the heavens where God resides or the creation of his heavenly "sons."

Therefore, in no biblical sense can this "beginning" refer to the "absolute beginning of time." God's heavenly "sons" had already existed, acted, and thought in ways that were measurable by him prior to the events of Genesis 1:1 (and, therefore, likely before the "beginning" John 1:1 as well). For example, in Job 38:4-7 Jah asks Job:

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? [NIV, underlining added.]

John 1:1 does not say Jesus was "before" the beginning. Therefore, if this "beginning" is the same "beginning" as Genesis 1:1 (which the rest of Genesis 1 reveals as the "beginning" of the physical universe and of the earth in particular), then based on what we read elsewhere in the Bible the Logos either was the "beginning" of "the beginning," or he existed "before" the "beginning" of all *physical* things. The "sons of God" also existed "before" this "beginning," as Job 38 reveals. But beyond the descriptions in Genesis 1, what other good reasons exist in the Bible to show that "the beginning" of Genesis 1 and John 1 is the 'beginning of the *physical* universe'?

When John said that the Word was "in the beginning" (Greek: ἐν ἀρχῇ, *en arche*), in using the exact same opening words as the LXX of Genesis 1:1 he appears to have had this same beginning in mind.¹⁸ Additional evidence supporting this connection can be seen in the quotation of Psalm 102:25 in Hebrews 1:10 (discussed

¹⁸ The fact that the Greek article does not precede *arche* ("beginning") in Joh 1:1 does not break the connection with Gen 1:1, which likewise contains an anarthrous (= without the article) *arche*. Samuel Green (*Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament* [New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1912], page 190, sec. 219) writes: "Some prepositional phrases omit the Article; in most instances denoting time, place, or state." See also R. Kühner, *Grammar of the Greek Language*, trans. B.B. Edwards and S.H. Taylor (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1853), page 314, sec. 244.

in further detail in the next section), which reads, “*In the beginning* [Greek: κατ ἀρχάς, *kat arkhas*], O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (NIV). In this case, what was created in the “beginning” is clearly limited to the physical universe.

However, because Jesus himself is called “*the beginning* of God’s creations” in Revelation 3:14 and the “*the beginning* of his [= Jah’s] ways [Greek: ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ, *archen hodon autou*]” in the LXX of Proverbs 8:22 (both texts will be discussed later in this chapter), there are at least two possible, biblical understandings of “beginning” as used in Genesis 1, in John 1, and in Psalm 102:25/Hebrews 1:10.

The first understanding is illustrated in figure 5.1 below, and it suggests that “the beginning” is a time period, the duration of which is unknown to humans, but measurable by God from the time he created the Logos to his creation of humankind. I end this “beginning” with the creation of humans because Jesus himself specifically states that our origin is “from the beginning” (ἀπ ἀρχῆς, *ap arches*) in Matthew 19:4, and in Mark 10:6 it is stated more precisely that we were made male and female “from *the beginning of creation*” (ἀπὸ ... ἀρχῆς κτίσεως, *apo ... arches ktiseos*). If we compare 2 Peter 3:4, “creation’s beginning” (ἀρχῆς κτίσεως, *arches ktiseos*), then once again “beginning” refers to the creation of humankind. Therefore, the Logos could have been “in” this “beginning” by being its first creation, and so “the earliest of [Jah’s] achievements of long ago.”—Proverbs 8:22.

Another possible understanding of the biblical “beginning” referenced in all of the above texts is shown in figure 5.2. Here the “beginning” is a reference to the creation of all *physical* things. The Logos had a beginning, by being “the beginning of the creation of God.” But according to figure 5.2 this “beginning” of the Logos was before the “beginning” of Genesis/John 1:1, as these texts refer only to the “beginning” of the physical creations of God, namely, “the heavens and the earth” and all that followed them including the creation of humankind.

Figure 5.1
"the beginning"

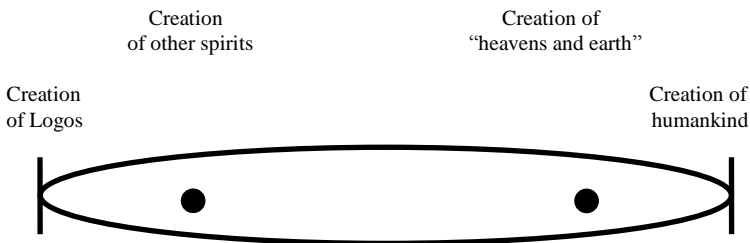
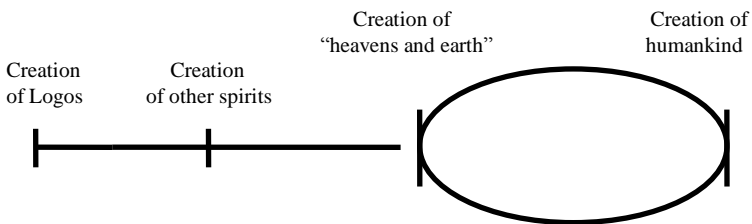


Figure 5.2

"the beginning"



When "was" the Word? In either understanding of "beginning" illustrated above, the Logos is "in" it by being its start, or (as in figure 5.2) by existing up to and during the time when God created all physical things "through him." Biblically, then, the Logos could have existed "before" the beginning if "beginning" is limited to the creation of all physical things (again, as in figure 5.2). There are no good biblical reasons, however, for believing that the Logos existed "before the absolute beginning of time." While the biblical view of time is not in agreement with how Trinitarians often present it, some point to another word in John 1:1 as a good reason for believing that the Logos is eternal.

I have found absolutely no justification in the Bible for understanding the Greek word $\eta\nu$ (*en*, "was") as denoting anything other than the Word's existence with God "in the beginning." I believe this is the case regardless of whether the

view of “beginning” in figure 5.1 or in figure 5.2 is accepted. The use of “was” no more means the Logos is eternal¹⁹ than would the Greek ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦσαν οἱ ἄγγελοι (*en arche esan hoi angeloi*, “in the beginning were the angels”). In other words, the Bible does not provide us with a basis for understanding “was” or “were” (as in my example clause) as if they by themselves indicate eternal existence.

In John 1:1 there is a contrast between this verb (*en*, “was”) in verses 1 and 2 (in reference to the Word’s existing with God “in the beginning”) and the Greek verb ἐγένετο (*egeneto*, “came to be,” used in reference to the “things” created in this “beginning” or in this part of this “beginning”). But this is a contrast between that which was existing (the Word) during the time period to which John here refers, and that which ‘came into existence’ through the Word, namely, the physical universe described in Genesis 1:1. It is not necessarily a contrast between an *eternal* being and created things, but of a being who was existing “with God” and those “things” that came into existence “through him” during “the beginning.”²⁰

Based on the descriptions given in Genesis Chapter 1, all of the “things” there created by God are a part of the material or physical universe. The use of “all things” (Greek: πάντα, *panta*) in John 1:3 can similarly be limited to the physical universe, or even to the physical things of this earthly realm. Consider the reading of Psalm 8:5 (8:6 in the LXX), where the RSV reads: “Thou hast given him [man] dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things [Greek LXX: *panta*] under his feet.” Clearly, in this text (which is quoted in Hebrews 2:8) man is

¹⁹ This is the contention of R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), page 21.

²⁰ Even as far back as 1850 Trinitarian scholar Moses Stuart, “Exegetical and Theological Examination of John 1:1-18,” *BSac* 7 (January, 1850), page 16, wrote:

To say, as some have said, that ἦν [‘was’] of itself denotes *timeless existence* (like ἐστὶ [‘is’] in Θεὸς ἐστὶ [‘God is’]), seems not to be well founded in the laws of grammatical usage. The assertion of the *eternity* of the Logos depends not on the use of ἦν [‘was’], but on the nature of the declarations respecting him.

But there are no such “declarations” concerning “the *eternity* of the Logos” in the NT! Indeed, the Prologue itself speaks of the Logos in temporal terms as the “only-begotten god” (Joh 1:18), as discussed in Chapter 4.

given authority over the 'works of God's hands,' namely, the physical creations of this earthly realm. The rest of the Psalm, like the rest of Genesis, presents these works or creations in descriptively clear terms:

When I see your heavens, the works of your fingers,
 The moon and the stars that you have prepared, ...
 You make [man] dominate over the works of your hands;
 Everything you have put under his feet:
 Small cattle and oxen, all of them,
 And also the beasts of the open field,
 The birds of heaven and the fish of the sea,
 Anything passing through the paths of the seas.
 O Jehovah our Lord, how majestic your name is in all the
 earth! [Psalm 8:3, 6-9 (NWT)]

Therefore, clearly, "all things" must be qualified by its context and understood in relation to the subjects and objects described and the actions taken concerning these "things" during the particular period described. In John 1:3, the Logos is said to be "in the beginning," which is either the beginning of which he himself is "*the*" beginning, or it is a "beginning" in which God created all physical things through the Logos.

In either case, "all things" that were created through the Logos likely refer to "all [physical] things" in Genesis 1, particularly in the light of other texts such as Psalm 102:25 and Psalm 8:5(6).²¹ But if the Logos is the one "through whom" all things were made, does this mean he was the Creator? If so, how can he be the Creator *and* be God's "Firstborn"?

Is the Logos the Creator?

"Through him." When John wrote the Word was "in the beginning ... with God" there are good reasons for believing John had in mind the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1, which speaks about the creation of "the heavens and the earth." In Genesis 1:26 Jah says,

²¹ Compare the use of "all things" and 'all living things' in Sirach 1:4 and 49:16, respectively, to "all things" in Col 1:15-17 (see note 78).

“Let *us* make man in *our* image.” Just as John’s “in the beginning” has a connection with the same phrase used in Genesis 1:1, so John’s reference to more than one being involved in creation appears to be connected with God’s use of “us” and “our” in Genesis 1. In fact, John further writes, “All things came into existence through [the Logos], and apart from him not even one thing came into existence” (John 1:3). How, though, should we understand John’s use of “through” in the light of Genesis’ use of “us” and “our” by God? Are “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 the same as ‘every single thing’ as described in John 1:3?

Ron Rhodes criticizes Jehovah’s Witnesses’ understanding of the Logos’ role in creation. Rhodes believes since the Greek preposition *dia* (Greek: διὰ) used in John 1:3 is also used for the Father in Romans 11:36 and in Hebrews 2:10, then the Logos must not have had a “secondary, lesser role” in creation.²² In fact, Bowman even claims Jehovah’s Witnesses are ‘embarrassed’ because *dia* is used of the Father in Romans 11:36 and Hebrews 2:10, and so that is why NWT translates *dia* as “by” in those texts whereas when it is used of Jesus in John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, and in Hebrews 1:2 the NWT reads “through.”²³

While it is true *dia* is used of the Father in the two referenced texts, good reasons can be presented to show it is *not* used in Romans 11:36 or in Hebrews 2:10 to express the same meaning as it does when used of the Logos’ role in creation. For example, in BAGD, page 180, we are told *dia* refers to the Word “as intermediary in the creation of the world [John] 1:3, 10; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16.” Yet, on the same page this lexicon notes when *dia* is used of the Father it speaks of Him as the “originator of an action.” Similarly, Maximilian Zerwick writes the following concerning the use of *dia* with the genitive grammatical case:

The causal sense with the genitive, which of itself expresses only intermediary or instrumental causality (*through*), e.g. God speaks διὰ τοῦ προφήτου [*dia tou prophetou*, “through the prophet”], may also cover the principal cause, e.g. Rom 11,36 ... So too 1 Cor 1,9; 12,8; Heb 2,10; 13,11; 1 Pet 2,14 etc. Hence too much

²² Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 77.

²³ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 69.

stress must not be laid on the use of the preposition διὰ with the genitive as expressing the role of mediator, where it is used of Christ's (the Word's) action as creator (Jo 1,3, 10; Col 1,16) or redeemer (Rom 5,9).²⁴

Therefore, at least one recognized Greek grammatical work appreciates openly that *dia* may denote either an "intermediary" or a "principal cause." An excellent example of *dia* used for the "principal cause" is found in 1 Corinthians 1:9, where it is said that God is the one "*by whom you were called* [δι' οὗ ἐκλήθητε, *di' hou eklethete*] into a sharing with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Clearly *dia* is used here of God, as distinct from "his Son Jesus Christ," and it is used of God as the principal cause of our calling. But *dia* is elsewhere used of the intermediary agent that God used for his 'call,' namely, "through the good news" (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, *dia tou euangeliou*).—2 Thessalonians 2:14.

In view of these two different meanings that can be expressed using *dia*, Zerwick writes that 'too much stress must not be laid on the use of the preposition as expressing the role of mediator, where it is used of Christ's action in creation.' I do not believe that understanding Jesus' role as mediator in contrast to God the Father as the source or cause of all creation is an unwarranted, unbiblical position. In fact, this is precisely the distinction found elsewhere in the Bible.

As lexicographer C.L. Wilibald Grimm writes after citing 1 Corinthians 8:6 in what has come to be called "Thayer's Greek Lexicon," the Logos "is expressly distinguished from the first cause."²⁵ While the use of *dia* in different texts may require closer evaluation depending on the subject, in 1 Corinthians 8:6 "Paul chose his prepositions very carefully in order to distinguish between God the Father, who is the ultimate source of creation, and Christ, the Lord, through whom this activity took place."²⁶

²⁴ Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), page 38, sec. 113 (underlining added).

²⁵ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), page 133.

²⁶ Clarence T. Craig, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), page 93.

God the Father as the source of creation. According to Paul, the Father is the one “out of whom all things are” (ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα, *ex hou ta panta*) and the Son is the one “through whom all things are” (δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα, *di hou ta panta*). Biblically, then, the Father is the *source* of creation and the Son is the agent “through whom” God created. Paul’s careful use of the two prepositions *ek* and *dia* in 1 Corinthians 8:6, with his reservation of *ek* for the Father, helps us appreciate and understand what Paul means elsewhere when he uses the preposition *dia* in reference to either the work of the Father or of the Son in creation.

There are no good reasons for believing we have a reference to the Father as the source of creation in one biblical text and then a reference to him as the agent of his own works in another text! But *dia* can have a causal sense, which fits perfectly with other biblical texts that present the Father as the source of all creation. This does not mean, however, that all of sudden the intermediary role of Jesus in creation (also conveyed by *dia*) becomes causal just like the Father! As I will discuss further below, Colossians 1:16 uses a passive verb form for “create” in reference to what *someone else* (God) *did* “through” the “firstborn of all creation.” This, too, shows the causal sense for *dia* should not be associated with the role of the Logos in creation, at least not in the same sense in which the Bible clearly presents the Father as the source or first cause of all things.

Based on the use and reservation of *ek* for the role of the Father in creation, as well as the passive verb for “create” used in Colossians 1:16, I conclude with Moulton that in Romans 11:36 and in Hebrews 2:10 *dia* “is used of God, who is the final Cause and the efficient Cause of all things.”²⁷ When *dia* is used in reference to the action of the Son of God in creation, it denotes “mediate and not original authorship.”²⁸ Therefore:

although διὰ [*dia*] is occasionally used to express agency, it does not approximate the full strength of ὑπό [*hypo*]. This distinction

²⁷ James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3d ed., vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), page 106.

²⁸ Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, page 106.

throws light on Jesus' relation to the creation, implying that Jesus was not the absolute independent creator, but rather the intermediate agent in creation. ... Jn. 1:3 ... Heb. 1:2. ... The Passive With Intermediate Agent. When the agent is the medium through which the original cause has effected the action expressed by the passive verb, the regular construction is διὰ with the genitive ... All things were made through him. Jn. 1:3. Here God the Father is thought of as the original cause of creation, and the λόγος [logos] as the intermediate agent.²⁹

In spite of this, many English Bibles translate *dia* as "by" rather than as "through" where it concerns the role of the Logos in creation. Modern English readers might associate causation with "by" and agency with "through." But as Plummer and Robertson point out, "the [King James Bible in 1Co 8:6] is very inaccurate, translating ... διὰ [*dia*] 'by' instead of 'through.'"³⁰

In view of the distinction made in 1 Corinthians 8:6 between God the Father as the source of all things and the Son as his intermediary, it is better to translate *dia* in John 1:3 (as well as in Colossians 1:16 and in Hebrews 1:2) as "through" to express the Son's biblical role in creation. Therefore, it is no surprise to find early writers such as Origen (c. 185—c. 253 CE) acknowledging the following when discussing John 1:3:

And the Apostle Paul says in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "At the end of the days He spoke to us in His Son, whom He made the heir of all things, 'through whom' also He made the ages," showing us that God made the ages through His Son, the "through whom" belonging, when the ages were being made to the Only-begotten. Thus, if all things were made, as in this passage also, through [διὰ] the Logos, then they were not made by [ὕπὸ] the Logos, but by a stronger and greater than He. And who else could this be but the Father? [Underlining added.]³¹

²⁹ H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1928), pages 102, 162 (underlining added).

³⁰ A. Plummer and Archibald Robertson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950), page 168.

³¹ *Origen's Commentary on John*, ANF 10, Book 2, chap. 6, page 328.

While Origen chooses to make the distinction in terms of the two Greek prepositions *dia* and *hypo*, rather than *dia* and *ek* as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 8:6, the point is basically the same: God the Father is the cause and source of all creation, and the Son is the one “through whom” God created. Exactly in what sense the creative acts of God were mediated through the Son no one can say for sure, that is, based on what we have good reasons to believe according to the Bible. But Proverbs 8:22-31 does give us a pretty good description of how God worked “through” his Son, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

Respecting the role of the Logos in creation. In addressing the Witnesses’ teaching that God created “through” the Logos in some mediatorial sense, Bowman writes, “The idea that the supreme God required a ‘junior partner’ to do the dirty work of creating the world is a pagan idea, not a biblical one.”³² I have underlined “the dirty work” here because it reveals something disturbing about some Trinitarians’ perspective about what it would mean for God to create “through” a mediator.

Bowman not only demeans the Witnesses’ view of Jesus by describing the role we believe he had in creation as “dirty work,” but he disrespects the Son of God himself by looking down on what any clear-thinking person would have to admit is a privilege and an honor beyond what we can describe, and certainly not worthy of being brushed aside as “dirty work.” Apparently for Bowman, either the Son is the Creator or he is not a good enough Son of God, even as God’s exact image, to “worship” or to honor as the Bible commands us to do.—John 5:22-23; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3.

³² Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), page 69. Bowman then refers to chapter 4 of his book as a basis for such a conclusion, but nowhere in chapter 4 is this subject discussed. Apparently Bowman meant chapter 3, page 44 of his book where he attempts to connect the Arian view of creation with the Gnostic/Neoplatonic view. But no such connection is credibly made. The Arians did not believe there were two conflicting Gods, one a good God who sent Jesus as a revealer and another (identified as the God of the OT) who created the physical world out of preexisting matter (which was considered negative and deficient of being). Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe such teachings, either.

Further, Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe God "required" anyone to assist him in creating anything, as Bowman also claims. Rather, we believe God the Father *chose to* use his Son to create "all things," that is, other than the "firstborn of all creation" himself (Colossians 1:15-17). Jah could have continued to create without a mediator, but that is not how he chose to create. It is not a question of our preference, but a question of what the Bible teaches.

As I explained in Chapter 4 and as I will continue to show in this chapter, the Logos is God's "only-begotten" Son, one of his heavenly "S/sons" who was "with" him in the beginning," and used by God to create "all things." Indeed, "all things" were not only made "through" him but they were even made "*for him*," as he is the "heir of all things" (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). Therefore, his role as mediator and as the heir of all things should be *greatly* respected, not misrepresented and disrespected as "dirty work."

"With God." Bowman cites Genesis 1:1 and Isaiah 44:24 as proof that God could not have used anyone as a "master worker" when he created the universe. Of course, not only does Bowman's conclusion ignore the teaching of Proverbs 8:22-31 (discussed further, below), but Bowman's references do not in any way contradict the Witnesses' understanding of the Logos' role in creation. In Genesis 1:1 we read that God "created [בָּרָא, *bara*] the heavens and the earth." But this text does not say that God did not use his own Son as the agent of his creative acts. In the context of Isaiah 44:24 Jah is revealing the absurdity of worshipping idols as they are "all of them an unreality" (Isaiah 44:8-17 [quote is from verse 9]). By contrast, Jah is the true God, the real Creator, the one who is "stretching out the heavens by [him]self, laying out the earth," and so in verse 24 Jah asks, "Who was with me?"

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Isaiah 44:24 is a contradiction to Proverbs 8:25-27, which reads: "Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I [Wisdom] was brought forth; before [Jah] had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When [Jah] established the heavens, I was there" (RSV, underlining added). There *was* someone with God when he founded the earth, but it was not

some idol god of the nations whom Isaiah 44:24 addresses. According to the Bible, even the angels were present with God during the creation of the earth and they 'shouted in applause' (Job 38:7)! For good reasons, then, we believe Jah God *alone* created through the Logos. No one else was "with" Jah when he created through the Logos. This is quite consistent with Isaiah 44:24 and the rest of Bible, as it relates to the subject of creation.

As for the meaning of "apart from him [the Logos] not even one thing came into existence" (John 1:3 NWT), this can also be understood in its context. John's reference to the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1 shows that "all things" in verse 3 have to do with the *physical universe* (as discussed earlier). True, in Colossians 1:15-17 Paul expands on the things created through the Son, including "the things visible" (τὰ ὁρατὰ, *ta horata*) and "the things invisible" (τὰ ἀόρατα, *ta aorata*). But Paul does not here directly refer to the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1 and, though he makes a far more inclusive statement regarding the things made, he is also careful to first point out that the Son is "the firstborn of all creation"! Therefore, clearly, Paul provides a context within which to understand the all-inclusive statement ("all things") to naturally exclude both the Father and the one (the Logos) "through" whom these "things" were made.

That "all things" (*panta*) can refer to something other than every single created thing is clear from Paul's quotation of Psalm 8:6 in 1 Corinthians 15:27:

For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" [*panta*] has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ [NIV].

Just as it is clear that God is not one of the "things" placed in subjection to the Christ, the Bible also clearly reveals to us that God and his "firstborn" are excluded from the things which God made "through" that one! This is clear both from a review of the immediate and larger contexts in which their roles in creation are presented to us in the Bible. In John Chapter 1, "the beginning" refers back to Genesis Chapter 1's "beginning," or to "the

beginning" of "the heavens and the earth." Therefore, "all things" in John 1:3 is in reference to 'all *physical* things' God made according to Genesis 1:1, and according to the descriptions of what God created "in the beginning" therein described.³³

The "Firstborn"

Colossians 1:15-17. In John 6:57 Jesus gives an unqualified statement about the Father as the source of his life. Though the import of Jesus' words is seemingly clear for all to recognize, the controversy over whether or not the Son of God had a "beginning," a start to his glorious life in the heavens, has raged for centuries. Today the controversy continues, and Jehovah's Witnesses are right in the middle of it.

As explained in the previous section, and in Chapter 4, Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Bible teaches that Jesus, as the prehuman Logos of John 1:1, lived "with God" in heaven prior to the creation of the physical universe. It is also our belief, based on the Bible, that the relationship between Jesus and his Father is not eternal but that it came into existence when the Father gave life to his Son, who became his "Firstborn," indeed, "the firstborn of all creation." By means of the "firstborn" Jah gave life to other heavenly "sons" and then also to earthly creatures, including us.

In addition to the clear biblical testimony about the Father giving life to his Son (according to texts such as John 5:26 and 6:57), the very distinction so often made between these two as

³³ It is possible to divide the words and to punctuate Joh 1:3-4 in one of several ways. See, for example, the discussion by Peter van Minnen, "The Punctuation of John 1:3-4," *FN* 7 (May, 1994), pages 33-41. See also my, "Punctuation in Early Greek New Testament Texts," *Elihu Online Papers* 3 (September 4, 2010 [rev. February 7, 2011]). However we punctuate Joh 1:3-4, "all things" in the context of John 1 are 'all the physical things' made "through" the Word, the same 'all *physical* things' that are referenced in Gen 1. Indeed, *this* is the OT background for the introductory part of John 1. Therefore, every single thing that came into existence, in this context, did so "through" the Logos. However, the Word, outside of this context, came into being as the "firstborn of all creation," as I will now show from Col 1:15-17 and other ancient texts. But when van Minnen ("The Punctuation of John 1:3-4," page 35) writes that *panta* ("all things") is "creation in its widest possible sense," he fails to note contextual factors which limit *panta* to the 'through-him things.' It is "creation" (*ktisis*) as used by Paul in Col 1:15 and by John in Rev 3:14 that is "creation in its widest possible sense."

“Father” and “Son” is worth further reflection. While Trinitarians accept these two terms as applicable to God and to Jesus, they do not believe these words convey a temporal distinction between them where the Father existed before he gave life to his Son. But Trinitarianism assumes that no matter how God and Jesus are described in the Bible, they are eternal in their essential being and so there must be some other meaning for “Father” and “Son” when used of these two, or at least a severe limitation or restriction on the temporal distinction that is otherwise always accepted for “father” and “son” when used of real individuals.

Before considering additional biblical reasons supporting a temporal distinction between the “Father” and the “Son,” consider what one early Christian writer had to say about the relationship between God and Jesus as “Father” and “Son.” In his treatise *Against Hermogenes*, Tertullian (c. 160—c. 220 CE) makes an observation that is consistent with what I wrote earlier about the temporality that is a part of any real father-son relationship. Hermogenes believed that God created all things out of “Matter” that is itself (according to Hermogenes) unborn, unmade, and, thus, coeternal with God.

Part of Hermogenes’ argument hinges on his belief that God has always been “Lord” over something. Hermogenes believed that that “something” was Matter itself and that it therefore must also be eternal. In this way, God could always be considered “Lord.” Tertullian responded by pointing out that the title “Lord” only really applied to God “from the moment when those things began to exist, over which the power of a Lord was to act.”³⁴ Using a similar line of reasoning, Tertullian argued that God was not always a “Judge” nor was he always a “Father,” since there was “a time when neither sin existed with Him, nor the Son” (underlining added).³⁵

Tertullian’s reasoning on this point helps reveal at least one distinction between the Father and the Son: The Son is the “Son” because he received life from the Father. The giving of life by one to another is what makes one a F/father and the other his S/son. Another reason why I chose to bring Tertullian into the discussion

³⁴ ANF 3, chap. 3, page 478.

³⁵ ANF 3, chap. 3, page 478. The Latin of the underlined part is *et filius non fuit*.

on this point is because some have taken issue with citations of his writings in literature published by Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

For example, in a brochure discussing the history and scriptural limitations of the Trinity doctrine,³⁶ the Society asserts that Tertullian taught that "there was a time when the Son was not." However, Bowman claims that "the expression 'there was a time when the Son was not' was not used by Tertullian himself."³⁷ As can be seen from my quotation of Tertullian above, that is what he taught. There are other problems with Bowman's discussion of Tertullian as it relates to Jehovah's Witnesses.³⁸ But with the aforementioned thoughts on the use of "Father" and "Son" as terms qualifying the relationship between God and the Word³⁹ clearly in mind, I will now consider the meaning of Colossians 1:15-17.

In this account, Paul refers to the prehuman Jesus as the "firstborn of all creation." Jehovah's Witnesses maintain the word "firstborn" (πρωτότοκος, *prototokos*) is here used of the prehuman Jesus to show he is the *first* of God's creations. The preeminence

³⁶ *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989).

³⁷ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 31.

³⁸ For example, Bowman (*Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 31) quotes Holmes' translation of Tertullian's *Against Praxeas* (ANF 3, chap. 7, page 601) where Tertullian allegedly says, "Thus does He [God] make Him [the Son] equal to Him [God]." But it should be noted that this reading is not based on good manuscript authority. Holmes translates the Latin *parem* ("equal"), but the better-supported and more contextually satisfying reading is *patrem* ("Father"). Thus, A. Souter (*Tertullian Against Praxeas* [New York: Macmillan, 1919], pages 39-40) translates:

This is the complete birth of the word, since it proceeds out of God. Having been first created by Him as far as thought is concerned, under the name of wisdom—"the Lord created me as a beginning of ways,"—then begotten to actuality—"when he was preparing heaven, I was with Him,"—thereafter, making as Father for Himself Him from whom he proceeds and thus becomes His Son, He was made 'firstborn,' as having been begotten before everything [underlining added].

The reading "Father" (*patrem*) is better in this context, which considers the 'begetting' of the Son, and so Tertullian's response is that God is constituted a "Father" when he begets his Son. As Souter points out, "There is no reference to equality here, but only paternity" (Souter, *Tertullian Against Praxeas*, page 40, note 1).

³⁹ The belief that Jesus only became the Son from the time when he "became flesh" (Joh 1:14) is without scriptural foundation. References such as Heb 1:2 reveal that the *Son* was the one through whom God made all things, and Prov 30:4 shows that God had a particular Son with a "name" long before he came to earth as a man.

and position he has results from his being God's "firstborn," for as Deuteronomy 21:17 states, "The right of the firstborn's position belongs to him." Indeed, the "firstborn" is to be favored since being the "firstborn" means "that one is the beginning of his generative power" (underlining added).

Others, however, conclude that being the "firstborn" of God does not mean the prehuman Jesus was created before he came to earth. Though I have never had a Trinitarian tell me just who is God's true "firstborn" if it is not in fact the one identified as God's "firstborn" in the Bible (Jesus), Trinitarians have for some time claimed that "firstborn" has to do with Jesus' *position*, not with any temporal generation from or actual creation by God. For example, in 1892 Trinitarian J.B. Lightfoot authored a commentary on the book of Colossians⁴⁰ wherein he provides a lengthy discussion of Paul's reference to the Son as "the firstborn of all creation." Though he admits "at first sight it might seem that Christ is here regarded as one, though the earliest, of created beings," Lightfoot concludes the description involves a two-fold meaning of priority to and sovereignty over all creation.⁴¹ Lightfoot outright rejects the belief that Jesus is included in creation, even as God's "firstborn."

Lightfoot first notes that the "fathers of the fourth century rightly called attention to the fact that the Apostle writes not πρωτόκτιστος [*protoktistos*, 'firstcreated'], but πρωτότοκος [*prototokos*, 'firstborn']."⁴² Yet, *protoktistos* was not even in popular use until the second or early third centuries CE! When it was in more frequent use, then it was used for the prehuman Jesus with little or no apparent distinction in meaning between it and "firstborn."⁴³ As John Patrick writes:

⁴⁰ J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London; New York: Macmillan, 1892).

⁴¹ Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, pages 144-146.

⁴² Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, page 145.

⁴³ I completed a search for occurrences of *protoktistos* using the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* D CD ROM (Los Altos, CA: Packard Humanities Institute, 1993), available through the University of California at Irvine. The version I used contains Greek texts from Homer to 1453 CE. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 220 CE) is the earliest author in which *protoktistos* is found. Using the citation system given in Luci Berkowitz and Karl A. Squitier, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: Canon of Greek Authors and Works*, 3d. ed. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Appendix 4, the following occurrences of *protoktistos* were found in Clement's writings: *Stromata*

Clement repeatedly identifies the Word with the Wisdom of God, and yet he refers to Wisdom as the first-created of God; while in one passage he attaches the epithet "First-created," and in another "First-begotten," to the Word. But this seems to be rather a question of language than a question of doctrine. At a later date a sharp distinction was drawn between "first-created" and "first-born" or "first-begotten," but no such distinction was drawn in the time of Clement, who with the Septuagint rendering of a passage in Proverbs before him could have had no misgiving as to the use of these terms. ... Zahn ... points to the fact that Clement makes a sharp distinction between the Son and the Word who was begotten or created before the rest of creation and the alone Unbegotten God and Father.⁴⁴

There are good reasons for believing Paul's words in Colossians 1:15 mean the prehuman Jesus was indeed the first of God's creations, and since God has other "sons" (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) then as the first of the Father's creations the prehuman Jesus is also God's "firstborn." Lightfoot, however, believes such an interpretation ignores the context of Paul's statement and that it is "irreconcilable with other passages in the Apostolic writings."⁴⁵ However, since Lightfoot gives no examples of passages which are "irreconcilable" with the view of Colossians 1:15 that he rejects, Lightfoot cannot be taken seriously on this point.

But Lightfoot is on the right track when he attempts to parallel the meaning of "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15 with the meaning of "only-begotten" (see Chapter 4, pages 333-345). As the "firstborn" and "only-begotten" of God, Jesus' prehuman creation was unlike

(book, chapter, section, subsection, line) 5.6.35.1.4; 5.14.89.4.3; *Eclogae Propheticae* (chapter, section, line) 51.1.3; 51.2.2; 51.1.1; 52.1.2; 56.7.2; 57.1.2 (twice); 57.4.3; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* (section, extract, excerpt, line) 1.10.1.2; 1.10.1.7; 1.10.3.7; 1.10.6.1; 1.11.4.3; 1.12.1.1; 1.12.1.3; 1.20.1.2; 1.27.3.7; 1.27.5.6. It is worth noting that the ANF version of Clement's *Stromata* (ANF 2, chap. 6, page 452) translates one of these texts which use "the firstcreated" (τῶν πρωτοκτίστων) for Jesus, but in the ANF it is translated as "the firstborn"! Yet, later in this same work (ANF 2, chap. 14, page 465) τῆς σοφίας τῆς πρωτοκτίστου [*tes protoktistou*] τῷ Θεῷ is correctly translated, "Wisdom, which was the first of the creation [or, 'the first creation'] of God." This may simply be a case where the ANF translator understood that "firstborn" was synonymous with "firstcreated."

⁴⁴ John Patrick, *Clement of Alexandria* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1914), pages 103, 104, note 6 (underlining added).

⁴⁵ Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, pages 145.

any other because it was done without a mediator or agent. Therefore, "firstborn" when used of the prehuman Jesus involves more than simply being the 'first one born.' Being the "beginning of [another's] generative power" involves a uniqueness and position relative to others that "belongs to [the firstborn]."—Deuteronomy 21:17.

Lightfoot believes his interpretation gains support from Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* where, when speaking of the Logos, Justin writes, "We know him to be the first-begotten of God, and to be *before all creatures*."⁴⁶ But Justin is not in harmony with Lightfoot here, for Justin clearly understood the Son to have had a created beginning when he writes, "He is the Son of God, and since we call Him the Son, we have understood that He *proceeded before all creatures* from the Father by His power and will."⁴⁷ Indeed, earlier in his *Dialogue* Justin stated the following concerning the Logos:

But this Offspring which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon [Proverbs 8:22-31 (discussed below)] has made clear, that He whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a Beginning [compare Revelation 3:14 (discussed below)] before all His creatures and as Offspring by God.⁴⁸

With reference to these statements by Justin, Willis Shotwell observes: "The language here is such that it cannot be argued that Justin considered the Logos to be eternal. The most that can be said about the Logos is that *he was created before anything else*."⁴⁹ That is precisely what Jehovah's Witnesses believe about the biblical Jesus, based on what we read in texts such as Colossians 1:15-17.

Lightfoot next attempts to show that "sovereignty" is a predominant meaning for "firstborn." He first cites Psalm 89:27 (verse 28 in the LXX) where in the NWT we read: "I myself shall

⁴⁶ ANF 1, chap. 100, page 249 (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ ANF 1, chap. 100, page 249 (emphasis added).

⁴⁸ ANF 1, chap. 62, page 228 (underlining added).

⁴⁹ Willis A. Shotwell, *The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), page 105 (emphasis added).

place him as firstborn, The most high of the kings of the earth." Here Jah says he will "place," "make" (NASB), "appoint" (NIV), David as "firstborn." The text does not say that David was really Jah's firstborn.⁵⁰ Rather, Jah is speaking of the preeminent position commonly associated with and typically reserved for the firstborn (compare Deuteronomy 21:17), a position Jah *gives* to David. In David's case, being the "firstborn of the kings of the earth" is figurative because he was not the first king! But the prehuman Jesus is not said to have been 'placed' or 'appointed' as the "firstborn of all creation," in the process taking the rightful position from some other being who was created first by God and who is, therefore, God's true "firstborn."

In an effort to further support his preferred understanding of "sovereignty" apart from a temporal generation for "firstborn," Lightfoot notes that "the term 'firstborn' ... is given as a title to God Himself by R. Bechai on the Pentateuch, fol. 124.4, 'Who is *primogenitus mundi*,' שְׁהוּא בְּכֹרֶר שֶׁל עוֹלָם, i.e. ὁ ἑστὶν πρῶτότοκος τοῦ κόσμου ['who is firstborn of the world'], as it would be rendered in Greek."⁵¹ Moule, on the other hand, notes that "R. Bechai appears to be R. Bahya ben Asher, a late writer (died 1340 [CE]), who is scarcely important for the original meaning of our passage."⁵² R. Bechai's work on the Pentateuch is not only nearly thirteen centuries removed from the first-century use and understanding of "firstborn," but Bechai's methods of biblical interpretation are highly suspect. Consider:

BAHYA (BEHAI) BEN ASHER BEN HALAWA: One of the most distinguished of the Biblical exegetes of Spain. ... Bahya did not, like his eminent teacher, devote his attention to Talmudic science, but to Biblical exegesis, taking for his model Moses ben` Nahman, the teacher of Solomon ben Adret, who was the first to make use of the Cabala as a means of interpreting the Scriptural word. ... Bahya's principal work was his commentary on the Pentateuch. ... The method of the Cabala,

⁵⁰ Also, this reference to David as "firstborn" has nothing to do with his descent from Jesse, as Ron Rhodes suggests (*Reasoning*, page 131).

⁵¹ Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, page 145.

⁵² C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), page 65.

termed by him "the path of light," which the truth-seeking soul must travel. It is by means of this method, Bahya believes, that the deep mysteries hidden in the Scriptural word may be revealed, and many a dark passage elucidated. ... Owing to the large space devoted to the Cabala, the work was particularly valuable to cabalists, although Bahya also availed himself of non-Jewish sources.⁵³

Apparently it did not matter to Lightfoot or to those who cite him on this point, that Bechai relied on Jewish mysticism and special revelation to help him interpret the Scriptures.⁵⁴ Abbott is correct when he writes, "Rabbi Bechai's designation of God as 'firstborn of the world' is a fanciful interpretation of Ex. xiii. 2."⁵⁵ However, Bechai is hardly the extent of the evidence scholars have put forth to support the notion that a Kyrios (=Lord)-christology underlies Paul's use of "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15. It is simply one of the more unfortunate pieces of evidence that has been advanced by Trinitarians since Lightfoot first cited Bechai in support of his understanding of "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15.

The notion of temporal priority in the OT (LXX) use of *prototokos* is not in dispute, nor is the notion that the "right of the firstborn's position belongs to him" (Deuteronomy 21:17). In harmony with this, Larry R. Helyer writes, "The father's first-born male possessed a privileged status in family and society."⁵⁶ In view

⁵³ *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1925), page 446 (underlining added). See also, Isaac Landman, ed., *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1940), page 34; Cecil Roth and Dr. Geoffrey Wigoder, chief eds., *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, Israel; New York: Macmillan, 1971), page 105.

⁵⁴ Yet, some of those who use Bechai to support their claims regarding Col 1:15 will criticize Jehovah's Witnesses for citing Johannes Greber's translation of Joh 1:1. See my "Appendix C: The Watchtower and Johannes Greber," in *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, pages 565-567, for a discussion of the Watchtower's use of Greber's NT translation.

⁵⁵ T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1979), page 212.

⁵⁶ Larry R. Helyer, "The Prototokos Title in the New Testament" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979), page 13. Helyer, "The Prototokos Title in the New Testament," pages 14-15, also notes within "the lifetime of his father, the first-born generally took precedence over his siblings with regard to special affection and honor (cf. Zech. 12:10). ... in the absence of the father, the first-born son

of this, the title "firstborn" (Hebrew: בְּכוֹר, *bekhor*) could be used figuratively of those who are elevated to a certain position and given special privileges, but without actually being the true "firstborn." This is clear from Psalm 89:27(28), discussed previously, where Jah 'placed' (Hebrew: נָתַן, *natan*; LXX: τίθημι, *tithemi*) David as the "firstborn of the kings of the earth" (Psalm 89:27[28]). This figurative usage can also be seen in the reference to Ephraim as "firstborn" in Jeremiah 31:9, since Manasseh was Joseph's true "firstborn" son (Genesis 41:51). But since Ephraim "was elevated to the rank of first-born over his elder brother Manasseh," he is figuratively the "firstborn."⁵⁷

The use of "firstborn" in Exodus 4:22 is similar to these figurative uses, in that it applies "firstborn" to the entire nation of Israel.⁵⁸ There is a parallel to this verse in the apocryphal work Sirach 36:12 (Brenton's translation; 36:11 in Rahlfs' edition). Here reference is made to "Israel, whom thou hast named thy firstborn" (Brenton). Brenton's use of "named" here translates the Greek word ὁμοίωσας (*homoiosas* [a form of *homoio'o*]), which has to do with making "someone like a person or thing" (BAGD, page 707 [underlining added]). This once again shows the figurative meaning of "firstborn" for Israel, as does its application to Israel by Jah in Exodus 4:22.

These figurative uses of "firstborn" are not at all parallel to those texts in the NT where Jesus is called "firstborn" (Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:6). The NT does not use the title "firstborn" in these texts to indicate a 'placement,' 'adoption,' or 'election' of Jesus to a position (that of "firstborn") which in a more literal sense rightly belongs to another heavenly son of God, or to God's real "firstborn." Further, why did God's true "firstborn" not do what Jesus did, namely, give up his divine form, become a man, and give his life in obedience to the Father (Philippians 2:5-8)? Jehovah's

exercised authority over younger brothers and accepted responsibility for them (Gen. 37:21-30; 42:37)."

⁵⁷ Helyer, "The Prototokos Title in the New Testament," page 22.

⁵⁸ Helyer, "The Prototokos Title in the New Testament," page 37, correctly observes: "The texture of OT theology leads us to view the relationship between Yahweh and Israel in a religious or spiritual sense by employing the category of election to sonship" (underlining added), which "election" again shows the figurative nature of the sonship here involved. See also pages 44-45, 56 of Helyer's thesis.

Witnesses believe that is precisely what God's "firstborn" Son did, because we believe his real "firstborn" is the prehuman Jesus.

There is, however, one sense in which a figurative meaning could be given to "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15, though this would not necessarily apply to the use of this same term in Hebrews 1:6 (see below). In 1 Peter 2:13 *ktisis* ("creation") is used in reference to political figures including "kings" and "governors." It is possible, then, that Colossians 1:15 could be a fulfillment of Psalm 89:27, a text where "firstborn" is used figuratively. The one called "firstborn" in the Psalm is "placed" in this position and then viewed as preeminent among "the kings of the earth."⁵⁹ But this interpretation is doubtful in Colossians 1:15 for at least two reasons: 1) Christ is not said to have been "placed as" or "given" the position of "firstborn" (as is clearly indicated in the Psalm), and 2) the use of *pas* ("all") in Colossians 1:15

⁵⁹ In this light I will here cite 4Q369, the "Prayer of Enosh," which has some similarities with Ps 89:27-28. Craig A. Evans, "A Note on the 'First-Born Son' of 4Q369," *DSD* 2.2 (1995), page 194, translates the key line (6) as, "And you made him a first-born son to you." The term for "firstborn" in this fragment is missing but for one letter, ר (*resh*), and it is preceded by בן ("son"), which it modifies. Evans cites three parallels between Ps 89:20(21), 26-27(27-28) and 4Q369, namely: 1) David calls God his Father in Ps 89:26, which Evans takes as a parallel to line 10 in 4Q369, "as a father to his son" (partially restored by Evans as **כאב לבנו**); 2) Ps 89:27 states that God would "make" David his "firstborn," paralleling line 6 in 4Q369; and 3) Ps 89:27 says that the one placed in the position of "firstborn" would be "the most high of the kings of the earth," and Evans finds a partial parallel to this in line 7 (which he translates as, "like him for a prince and a ruler in all your earthly land" [Evans, "A Note on the 'First-Born Son' of 4Q369," page 198]). There are other non-biblical texts whose use of "firstborn" may have influenced Paul's use of this same term in Col 1:15 and in Heb 1:6 (if written by Paul). For example, Philo (*On the Confusion of Tongues* 146 [LCL edition]) speaks of "God's firstborn, the Logos, who holds the eldership among the angels, an archangel as it were." The "Prayer of Joseph" (dated to the first century CE by J.Z. Smith, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, James H. Charlesworth, ed. [New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985], page 700) refers to Jacob as if he is an angel named "Israel." Fragment A of this document reads, in part: "Abraham and Isaac were created before any work. But I, Jacob, who men call Jacob but whose name is Israel am he who God called Israel which means, a man seeing God, because I am the firstborn of every living thing to whom God gives life" ("Prayer of Joseph," page 713; the end of line 7 refers to the "firstborn" as "the archangel of the power of the Lord, and the chief captain among the sons of God"). These references clearly imply a temporal distinction between the "firstborn" and "the angels" (Philo) and between "every living thing to whom God gives life" ("Prayer of Joseph").

appears to remove any suggestion that "creation" in this verse refers *only* to political figures.⁶⁰

Colossians 1:15 is not the only scripture where Jesus is called "firstborn." In Luke 2:7 the baby Jesus is called Mary's "firstborn" in relation to her other children (Jesus' "brothers" [Luke 8:19-20]), and in Romans 8:29 Jesus is "the firstborn of many brothers" apparently because he is the first "image" after whom God patterned those who will similarly be "glorified" (Romans 8:17; compare 1 John 3:2). In Colossians 1:18 and in Revelation 1:5 Jesus is called the "firstborn from the dead" (Greek: πρωτότοκος ἐκ [ek is absent in Rev 1:5] τῶν νεκρῶν). The idea expressed here is connected with Jesus' resurrection from the dead in a special way in which others will follow.—Revelation 20:6.⁶¹

Finally, in Hebrews 1:6 God is spoken of as 'bringing his firstborn into the world.' In the context of Hebrews Chapter 1, the prehuman Jesus has already been called God's "Son" in verse 2, and the "reflection" (Greek: ἀπαύγασμα, *apaugasma*) of God's glory and the "imprint" (χαρακτήρ, *charakter*) of his being in verse 3. All of these, as well as "firstborn," are terms which denote a temporal distinction between the Son and 'his God' (Hebrews 1:9) in Hebrews Chapter 1.

Jesus' sovereignty over the angels is also expressed "to the extent that he has inherited a name more excellent than theirs" and because 'God is his throne' (or 'God enthroned'⁶² him) and 'anointed him with oil more than his partners' (Hebrews 1:4, 8-9). In all of these instances Jesus is literally the 'first one born' either from God, through Mary, or from the dead. These are not figurative uses of "firstborn" in the sense we find it used in OT texts such Jeremiah 31:9, Psalm 89:27 and Exodus 4:22.

Returning to the use of "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15, Helyer believes several factors rule out the possibility that "firstborn"

⁶⁰ Every other time *pas* is used with *ktisis* or *ktisma* ("creature") it refers to the whole of creation or at least to a portion of it including more than just political figures. (see Rom 8:22; Col 1:23; 1Ti 4:4; Rev 5:13). The use of *pas* in 1Pe 2:13 modifies ἀνθρωπίνῃ ("human"), which limits the *ktisis* here mentioned.

⁶¹ Note also Paul's application of Ps 2:7 to Jesus' resurrection in Ac 13:33 (compare Heb 5:5).

⁶² See *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, pages 164-169, for my discussion of the translation of Heb 1:8.

here means that Jesus was given life by God as the Father's first creation. Helyer's reasons are: 1) the predication of *kyrios* to Jesus which Helyer sees as the equivalent of referring to him as Jah of the OT⁶³; 2) the application of certain OT texts to Jesus that Helyer believes give him a status that would be unacceptable for a created being (for example, the application of Psalm 102:25-27 to Jesus in Hebrews 1:10-12, which Helyer sees as an identification of Jesus as the "creator of all things"⁶⁴); 3) Helyer believes the *eikon* ("image") title in Colossians 1:15 and the *pleroma* references in 1:19 and 2:9 ascribe "full deity" to Jesus⁶⁵; 4) the ὅτι (*hoti*) clause of verse 16 and the use of πρὸ πάντων (*pro panton*, "before all") in verse 17; and 5) the lack of emphasis on the *-tokos* element of *prototokos*, "which with the exception of Luke 2:7" (in Helyer's view) "is never emphasized in the NT."⁶⁶ I will now consider each of Helyer's reasons:

1) Jesus as "Lord": When *kyrios* is applied to Jesus in the New Testament it has a much different connotation than when it is applied to the Father. This can be seen primarily from the fact that the Father "made" Jesus "Lord" and "exalted him" to his position (Acts 2:36; Philippians 2:9). Jah is not Lord *because of someone else*. References to Jesus as "Lord" must be read with this biblical understanding in mind. As Ernest De Witt Burton observed some time ago: "The expression 'Lord God' (*Yahweh Elohim*) is often applied in the Old Testament to God, as is its Greek equivalent in the Septuagint and in the New Testament; but the latter is never used of Jesus." Burton also writes that the "facts indicate that 'Lord,' as applied to Jesus in the New Testament, is not even in its highest sense a term of nature or of identification with Jehovah, but of relationship to men and the world."⁶⁷ Others who have studied the use of "Lord" for Jesus in the NT have reached similar conclusions:

⁶³ Helyer, "The Prototokos Title," page 251.

⁶⁴ Helyer, "The Prototokos Title," page 251.

⁶⁵ Helyer, "The Prototokos Title," page 262.

⁶⁶ Helyer, "The Prototokos Title," page 262. See also Helyer's, "Arius Revisited: The Firstborn Over All Creation," *JETS* 31.1 (1988), page 63.

⁶⁷ Ernest De Witt Burton, *New Testament Word Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1927), pages 35-36 (emphasis added).

Paul's confidence in Jesus' lordship is primarily based upon the fact of exaltation, and in general he gives Christ only a mediate position, particularly in respect to the new creation, and he in no sense supplants God, who is always the one and only true Deity (1 Cor. 8:6) It is not at all probable that Κύριος [*Kyrios*, "Lord"], in the first instance, was appropriated to Jesus with any deliberate intention of assigning to him the revered and unspeakable name of Yahweh. ... and the Septuagint readers certainly knew that ["Lord"] was not itself the actual name of Yahweh but was merely an expedient of the translator. Moreover, no special sanctity could be attached to it as a mere word, for it was used in the Greek Bible variously of God, kings, and ordinary men. The real appropriateness of its application to Christ, as well as to God, lay in the fact that it was not essentially a proper name but a descriptive term, and so capable of varying degrees of title significance.⁶⁸

When applied to Jesus in the NT, the title "Lord" does not equate him with the one who made him Lord. Jah the Father gave this position to Jesus so he could administer Jah's will (Isaiah 9:7; 11:1-9). Jesus has complete authority over God's people as "Lord," even as "our only Owner and Lord" (Jude 4 [underlining added]; compare John 17:6). This is because the Father gave his Son all authority in heaven and on earth and because the Father "made him Lord" (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36; compare Daniel 7:14). The Bible also teaches when he as "Lord" accomplishes his Father's will for a "thousand years," then "the Son himself will also subject himself to the One who subjected all things to him, that God may be all things to everyone."—1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

2) Jesus as "Creator": Earlier in this chapter I discussed the role of the "Word" according to John 1:3 and what is said about "the firstborn of all creation" in Colossians 1:16-17. I noted in that same discussion that 1 Corinthians 8:6 clearly distinguishes between the Father as the source of "all things" and Jesus as the one "through whom" these same things came. But in Hebrews 1:10-12 the following quotation from Psalm 102:25-27 is applied to the resurrected Jesus:

⁶⁸ Shirley J. Case, "ΚΥΡΙΟΣ as a Title for Christ," *JBL* 26 (1907), pages 154, 159-160 (underlining added).

"You at [the] beginning, O Lord, laid the foundations of the earth itself, and the heavens are [the] works of your hands. They themselves will perish, but you yourself are to remain continually; and just like an outer garment they will all grow old, and you will wrap them up just as a cloak, as an outer garment; and they will be changed, but you are the same, and your years will never run out" [NWT].

In the Psalm we are told about Jah. But the quotation in Hebrews 1:10-12 is applied to the Son of God as part of an explanation about how Jesus is "better than the angels" by 'inheriting a name more excellent than theirs' (Hebrews 1:4). The author of Hebrews also begins his letter by noting that, in harmony with John and Paul, God created "through" the Son (Hebrews 1:2). As I also explained earlier, the author of Hebrews makes a clear temporal distinction between God and his Son, "the reflection of his glory and the copy of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). Given all of the representations made about Jesus in the first part of Hebrews Chapter 1, what can be shown to be the reason for applying Psalm 102:25-27 to Jesus in Hebrews 1:10-12?

There is an apparent association between Jesus' identity as the "Wisdom" of Proverbs 8 and the application of Psalm 102:25-27 to the Son in Hebrews 1:10-12. Though I will discuss the identity of "Wisdom" in the next section, there are good reasons for believing that Jesus is the "Wisdom" of Proverbs 8 who is also described as Jah's "master worker" (Proverbs 8:22-25, 30). Therefore, B.W. Bacon acknowledged, "The passage could be made to prove the doctrine that the Messiah is none other than the preexistent Wisdom of Prov 8, 22-31, 'through whom' according to our author [the author of Hebrews], v.2, God 'made the worlds.'"⁶⁹ However, since the author of Hebrews has already commented on the role of the Son in creation (verse 2), there may be another reason for the quotation and application of Psalm 102:25-27 to the risen Jesus in Hebrews 1:10-12.

⁶⁹ Benjamin W. Bacon, "Heb 1,10-12 and the Septuagint Rendering of Ps 102,23," *ZNW* 3 (1902), page 285. Compare F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), page 63, note 103.

By considering closely all of the descriptions given in the quotation of Psalm 102:25-27 in Hebrews 1:10-12, it becomes clear that the things made "through" the Son are 'perishable,' whereas since his resurrection the Son now 'remains continually' and his "years will never run out." Therefore, he is now like Jah God of Psalm 102:25-27, for the Father has "granted also to the Son to have life in himself" which life is now "indestructible" by contrast with creations which "perish" (John 5:26; Romans 6:9; Galatians 1:1; Hebrews 7:16, 25; Revelation 1:18). In this way, too, Jesus is now "better than the angels." Yet, his role in creation is not changed by the use of OT texts that help establish the Son's immortality in ways that show his superiority to both angels and to those creations made "through him."

Indeed, Jah saw fit to make Jesus a "carpenter's son" when he came to the earth (Mark 6:3), perhaps because that is similar to the role he had with his Father in heaven. But even as he was not the carpenter in the same sense in which Joseph directed and oversaw the work his son completed, similarly Jesus was not the Creator who created all things "through" himself, though both in heaven and on the earth Jesus worked with and helped his heavenly Father and his earthly father, which I do not believe Jesus would ever describe to others as "dirty work."

3) Jesus as the "Image of the Invisible God": The first part of Helyer's third objection (namely, that *eikon* ["image"] ascribes "full deity" to Jesus) is a purely subjective statement and we must determine exactly what it is Helyer means by "full deity" before we can say whether Helyer's understanding of "deity" is biblical. Jehovah's Witnesses do not deny the "full deity" of Jesus as it is presented in the Bible, namely, by being God's Son and the "reflection of his glory and the exact copy of his being."—John 10:30-36; Hebrews 1:3.

For a more complete discussion of the "fullness" which makes one "a god" according to Colossians 1:19 and 2:9, see pages 152-160 of the Second Edition of this book. But these two texts, particularly Colossians 1:19, are part of the immediate context of Colossians 1:15 and part of the over-all teaching of the Bible concerning the prehuman Jesus, which reveals he is a created being, indeed, the "firstborn" of God.

4) The significance of the ὅτι (*hoti*) clause: Helyer argues that the *hoti* clause (“because by means of him ...”)⁷⁰ and the fact that “the firstborn of all creation” is said to be “before all things,” “unambiguously declare [Christ] to be the pre-existent mediator of all creation.”⁷¹ Helyer then cites Martin’s observation, “If the pre-incarnate Lord was the agent of all creation, and pre-existed before everything, it leads to the conclusion that only God can satisfactorily account for Christ’s being.”⁷² Exactly! It is clear, then, that “the firstborn” could not be one of “things” created “through him.” *That is precisely why the NWT uses the word “other” in brackets four times in verses 16-17.*

While Paul uses “firstborn” to *include* the prehuman Jesus in “creation” (*ktisis*), the NWT uses “other” several times in Colossians 1:16-17 to *exclude him* from the “through-him” things indicated by the use of *panta*.⁷³ Figure 5.3 illustrates my view of this distinction, inclusion, and exclusion according to the Bible. The depiction of *ta panta* below, as in some (metaphysical) sense located “in” the “firstborn,” should not be embraced without some reservation. After all, we do not know precisely in what sense *ta panta* was made “in,” or even “through,” the “firstborn.”

It is possible, however, that the first ἐν[en]-clause in verse 16 should be taken in an instrumental sense (“by means of him”), as we find in the NWT and in other NT translations. But it is also possible that the first ἐν-clause is used just as the second ἐν-clause is used, namely, with a “locational” sense indicating “where” (metaphysically speaking) “all things” were made (that is, again, “in him” or “in” the “firstborn”).

⁷⁰ The use of *hoti* here is simply to introduce an independent sentence and it may not need translating at all (see J.C. O’Neill, “The Source of the Christology in Colossians,” *NTS* 26 [1980], pages 90-91).

⁷¹ Helyer, “The Prototokos Title,” page 262.

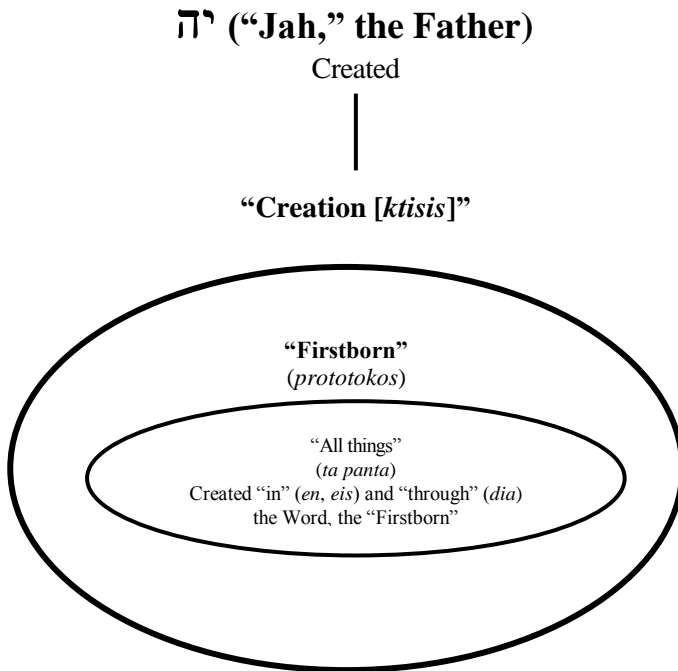
⁷² Helyer, “The Prototokos Title,” page 262; see also, Helyer, “Arius Revisited,” page 63.

⁷³ In the Bible it is not uncommon to find “other” and words of similar import used when the text involves a comparison (see Lu 13:2 [note the use of *panta*]). But “other” is also used at times in passages where it is implied and used to *include* what might otherwise be viewed as an *excluded* member of a group. In Ac 5:29, for example, Peter is not excluded from the group of “apostles.” See also the use of “other” in Heb 11:32. In Col 1:20 “other” is used to exclude certain “things” from being reconciled to God through Christ, such as Satan.—Compare Rev 20:10, 14.

This locational sense for the first $\epsilon\nu$ -clause might also be another way of expressing what is meant by "through him," in whatever way it is that God created "through"/"in" his "firstborn":

Figure 5.3

The "Firstborn's" Relationship to "Creation" and to "All Things"



We must also here consider the proper sense of $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\tau\omicron\nu$ (*eis auton*), which could be understood as expressed by the NWT and by other translations, namely, "for him." It could also be viewed in a sense similar to the locational view of the $\epsilon\nu$ -clauses mentioned above.⁷⁴ What is clear is that the "firstborn" was in

⁷⁴ In any event, the sense of *eis auton* in this passage is not necessarily the same as it is in Rom 11:36, since the one spoken of in Rom 11:36 is the source (*ex autou* [compare the use of *ex hou* in 1Co 8:6]) of *ta panta*, and *dia* is there used in reference to him as the principal cause, as discussed earlier. In Col 1:16 the "firstborn" (to whom the adverbial *en auto* refers) is shown to be someone other than the Creator by the use of the passive verb $\epsilon\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\theta\eta$ (*ektisthe*). If we change the passive clause to an active one by making the verb active, and by changing the subject to an object, it is clear the

some sense the passive recipient of *ta panta* ("all things"), and that he now "sustains all things [*ta panta*] by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). But the fact that "the firstborn" is excluded from "all things" (*ta panta*) does not have to mean he is also excluded from "all creation" (*pases ktiseos*). Jehovah's Witnesses believe Paul included "the firstborn" in the collective "creation," which is everything or everyone that received life "out of" or "from" God the Father, including the Son.—John 5:26; 6:57; 1 Corinthians 8:6.

Indeed, though *ta panta* is used here in Colossians 1:16 in a very broad sense, including the "things visible and the things invisible," it is nonetheless (as with John 1:3), restricted by the context to that which "was created" (*ektisthe* [see note 74]) by God "through" the agency of "the firstborn."⁷⁵ In fact, in verse 18 *pas* ("all [things]") is context-specific, as there are certainly many negative things in which Jesus does not "hold the first place." In verse 20 *ta panta*⁷⁶ is again limited by the context, as there are many who will not be reconciled to God through the Christ (see note 73).

5) The *-tokos* element of *prototokos* is only emphasized in Luke 2:7 in the NT: Helyer's view here is entirely subjective

"firstborn" is not the Creator. The Father is the only one who could rightly be viewed as the Creator in this context, and he is in fact mentioned in verses 13, 14 and 19. Verse 19 is particularly instructive for in it, like in verse 16, the instrumental *en auto* is used in reference to what *the Father* did. Finally, another passive verb (ἐκτισται [*ektistai*]) is used at the end of verse 16, once again showing that God did the creating "through" and "for" (or "in[to]") his "firstborn."

⁷⁵ Even here it is also possible to understand *ta panta* strictly as a reference to the creation of all physical things. The locational ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ("in the heavens and upon the earth") speaks of the place where *ta panta* was made, all of which could in fact be limited to the physical 'heavens and earth' of Gen 1:1, as in Joh 1:3. As for the things "invisible," this may not involve immaterial spirits or anything else in the spiritual heavens (Ne 9:27; Job 16:19; Ps 11:4; 14:2; 18:6; 113:5-6; Matt 23:22). After all, much of what is "visible" to us today due to the use of space technology was not "visible" or as visible to those who lived in ancient times. It is possible, therefore, that the "invisible" things involved unseen heavenly bodies in the physical universe which "cannot be counted."—Jer 33:22.

⁷⁶ As shown already, the use of *panta* (a neuter form of *pas*), with or without the article, is used to refer to those things made "through" the Logos or Wisdom of God. Note that in Col 1:16 *panta* is used twice with the article, but in verse 17 *panta* is used once with and once without the article. In 1Co 8:6 *panta* is used with the article, but in Joh 1:3 *panta* is used without the article.

and, based on the use of "firstborn" in the NT, insupportable. Indeed, it does not appear that only one element of this word is emphasized in any of the NT texts considered above. Upon reviewing the use of "firstborn" in the Bible, it is clear the word is used figuratively at times but only where the context and accompanying terms reveal a purely figurative usage. In the NT and even in the majority of cases in the OT⁷⁷ the word's complete connotations are literally conveyed, including temporal priority.

Therefore, for all of the reasons given above, the genitive *pases ktiseos* ("of all creation") is properly seen as partitive, which means the "firstborn" is in the collective group of created things though dignified above it according to "the right" of the "position [that] belongs to him" (Deuteronomy 21:17).⁷⁸ Verses 16-17 *exclude* the prehuman Jesus from *ta panta*, which is contextually limited to those things created *through* "the firstborn."⁷⁹ Even early opponents of Arianism understood the

⁷⁷ A check in any OT concordance for the use of the word "firstborn" will show that it is predominantly used to indicate a child's temporal priority to other children. An excellent example of this usage is Joshua 6:26, where the "firstborn" is contrasted with the "youngest" child.

⁷⁸ The idea that one can be dignified above the group to which he or she belongs can be found in other literature related to the Bible. For example, in Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 49:16 we are told that "Adam was above all [form of *pas*] living things in the creation" (Greek: ὑπὲρ πάντων ζῶον ἐν τῇ κτίσει Ἀδάμ). Clearly Adam was a "living thing in the creation," and yet here he is distinguished from "all" such things! This text could rightly be translated, "Adam was above all [other] living things in the creation." Here the sense would be slightly different from the NWT's use of "other" in Col 1:16-17, since there "other" can be understood to exclude the "firstborn" from *ta panta* though he is included in "creation." But Col 1:16-17 could also be understood in a sense similar to how *pas* is used in Sirach 49:16, namely, as including the "firstborn" in "all things" but with the understanding that he is "the firstborn" of all creation and so "above" it even as Adam was considered to be above the creation to which he also belonged. Another parallel to Col 1:15-17 is Sirach 1:4, "Wisdom was created before all things [form of *pas*]" (Greek: προτέρα πάντων ἐκτίσται σοφία, *protera panton ektistai sophia*). Here "Wisdom" is clearly revealed as a created being and at the same time shown to be distinct from 'all [other] created things' (see also 1:8). The initial description of Wisdom as a created being allows *panta* to be used without any confusion. This is exactly what we have in Col 1:15-17: Jesus is called the "firstborn of all creation" and *then* "all things" are referred to as distinct from him, because his inclusion either in "creation" or in "all things" is understood from the prior description of him as "firstborn."

⁷⁹ James White, *The Forgotten Trinity: Recovering the Heart of Christian Belief* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany, 1998), pages 212-213, note 13, tries to deny the distinction made between *pas ktisis* and *ta panta*. However, White does not support his

expression in 1:15 as a partitive genitive. They simply redefined "creation" as the "new creation" (compare 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15), and then considered the human Jesus as the "firstborn" of this group.⁸⁰

In some of my conversations with Trinitarians, several of them have offered a rather interesting argument, namely, that for Jesus to be considered the "firstborn" in any literal sense he would have to have a father, a mother, a brother (or brothers), and/or a sister (or sisters). But there really is no basis for arguing that the exact particulars in all respects concerning which a human child is literally the "firstborn" must also apply to other forms of life (like spirit beings) which do not have the same parental arrangement. In the Bible, spirit beings are also revealed as "sons of God," not as 'sons and daughters of God' (compare Job 38:7). So there is a clear difference between the types of children God has and the types of children humans can have.

Yet, in spite of this difference, for both human and divine "sons" the Bible shows that the first one born can be singled out and considered "only-begotten" and/or "firstborn." While the Bible does teach this, it does not teach us that God has a wife with whom he produces children, in a manner similar to how human parents procreate. There are no good reasons upon which to argue that for one of God's "S/son" to be his "firstborn," then the

assertion with a critical analysis of either expression, and so his argument has no credibility, as it appears to be founded only on dogmatic conviction. White then concludes with the following *non sequitur* (= an argument whose conclusion does not follow from the stated premise[s]), "Admitting that the Son is excluded from 'all things' makes the Son the Creator." Again, not only does White here assume an equivalence between "all creation" (of which Jesus is the "firstborn") and "all things" that were made "through" the "firstborn," but as explained in note 78 above even if "all creation" and "all things" are the same that would not necessarily preclude the "firstborn" from being included in both and at the same time separate from them in a sense similar to how Adam and Wisdom are included and distinguished from "all living things in the creation" and from "all things," respectively (Sirach 1:4; 49:16). The rest of White's discussion of Col 1:15-17 (*The Forgotten Trinity*, pages 109-116) contains unbiblical assumptions and errors associated with a non-temporal meaning for "firstborn" and in relation to Jesus' role in creation, all of which have been addressed in this book. For a discussion of White's misuse of Gnosticism as informing Paul's statements in Col 1:15-17 and 2:9, see my *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, pages 152-160.

⁸⁰ Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, page 146. See also, Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, page 213.

spiritual "firstborn" must also have a mother with whom God procreated!

In John 14:2 Jesus said that his Father's "house" (οἰκία, *oikia*) contains "many abodes" or "rooms" (Greek: μοναὶ πολλάι, *monai pollai*). It is not necessary to accept what the disciples considered an *oikia* ("house") in every human sense in order for it to serve as a point of comparison between it and a heavenly "house" or "room." On the other hand, if we say that an *oikia* is here used figuratively for what is in Jesus' Father's "house," then we are assuming that a *literal* "house" only exists according to human terms. Instead, based on what Jesus said and how he said it, his words can be understood as indicating that the equivalent of what we humans consider a "house" or a "room" does in fact exist in heaven. Indeed, there are "many" of them in his "Father's house."

Helyer also raises the question about "what [Paul] would have been able to believe as a committed Jewish Christian monotheist."⁸¹ But Helyer himself makes a "dubious assumption" regarding Jesus as the "incarnation of the eternal Son of God."⁸² Indeed, Helyer does not deny that his understanding may be "colored by the lenses of Nicea and Chalcedon," to use Helyer's phrasing of a potential rejoinder by Dunn. Rather, Helyer admits, "That may be." In fact, it is true, for Helyer's reference to Paul's affirmation of monotheism "as fundamental for his converts" is the very monotheism articulated by Trinitarians of post-biblical times, and it is in direct conflict with the monotheism presented by Paul in the two texts he cites for comparison.—1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:6.

Helyer makes some good observations concerning "Paul's cosmic Christology against the backdrop of his Jewish roots."⁸³ But Helyer, Lightfoot, and other scholars and critics of Jehovah's Witnesses are committed to a Trinitarian understanding of God which keeps them from embracing Jesus as both our Lord and as "the firstborn of all creation." Indeed, for Trinitarians, God's real

⁸¹ Larry Helyer, "Cosmic Christology and Col 1:15-20," *JETS* 37.2 (1994), page 246.

⁸² Helyer, "Cosmic Christology and Col 1:15-20," page 246 (underlining added).

⁸³ Helyer, "Cosmic Christology and Col 1:15-20," page 240.

firstborn, that is, his very first creation, remains nameless and unidentified, in spite of the fact that “the right of the firstborn’s position belongs to him.”—Deuteronomy 21:17.

Proverbs 8:22-31. One of the primary biblical texts which opponents of the Nicene Creed used in support of their contention that the Son was a created being is Proverbs 8:22. Many modern English translations render this verse similar to the RSV, “The LORD [Jah] created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.” But the precise meaning of the Hebrew word translated “created” (׀ַבֵּרָא, a form of *qanah*) in the RSV and in other versions has been the subject of dispute, particularly (it seems) when this verse is applied to the prehuman Jesus.

However, it was not the text as found in the Hebrew Bible which served as the focus of many a discussion during the Nicene controversy. Rather, it was the reading of the Greek OT (or LXX). During this time the LXX was considered as inspired and as authoritative as the Hebrew Scriptures from which it was translated.⁸⁴ This made pro-Trinitarian rebuttals to Proverbs 8:22 difficult because the LXX (in 8:23) translates *qanah* with ἐκτίσέν, a form of the Greek verb *ktizo* meaning to “create” or “make.” The use of this word in the LXX of Proverbs 8:23 forced Trinitarians like Athanasius (c. 296—373 CE) to look elsewhere for an explanation of this text, that is, for one consistent with their theology.

That early Trinitarians failed to give a credible explanation of Proverbs 8:22 can be seen from Athanasius’ great effort, over many pages, but ultimately resulting only in the following: “‘The Lord created me a beginning of His ways,’ as if to say, ‘My Father hath prepared for Me a body, and has created Me for men in behalf of their salvation.’”⁸⁵ So Athanasius interprets Proverbs

⁸⁴ See Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (JSOTSup 206; England: Sheffield, 1996), pages 68-94.

⁸⁵ From his “Four Discourses Against the Arians,” in NPNF 4, Second Series, Discourse 2, Chapter 19, page 374, sec. 47. This is Athanasius’ repeated conclusion throughout his lengthy discussion of this passage. Note also his claim that “no one says that He begets what he creates” (“Four Discourses Against the Arians,” in NPNF 4, Discourse 2, Chapter 19, page 374, sec. 48). But in human terms we typically do not refer to the conception and birth of a child as “creation.” Yet, creation (of a sort) is precisely what takes place inside the mother’s womb, resulting in the birth of a child.

8:22 as a reference to the Word's 'becoming flesh' (John 1:14). I will now provide the good reasons for why I believe the being described in Proverbs 8:22-31 is the *prehuman* Jesus.

One difference in the interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 among Trinitarians that has emerged since the time of Athanasius is that many Trinitarians today reject an identification of the prehuman Jesus as the Wisdom of Proverbs 8. For example, Bowman argues, "If we take [Proverbs] 8:22 to speak literally about Christ, we must also assume that Christ is a woman who cries in the streets (1:20-21), and who lives with someone named 'Prudence' (8:12) in a house with seven pillars (9:1)!"⁸⁶

Still, Bowman appears to acknowledge the possibility Jesus may be described in Proverbs 8:22, though he argues against applying any descriptions from Proverbs 8 to Jesus which might indicate he was created by Jah, "Assuming that Proverbs 8:22 was a description of Christ, it would be just as much a mistake to argue from Proverbs 8:22 that Christ was created as to argue from 2 Samuel 7:14 that Christ would be a sinner!"⁸⁷

Regarding Jesus' prehuman 'birth' from God, whether we say he was "created" or "begotten" the main point is that he was given life by the Father (compare Joh 5:26; 6:57). No one thinks of "begotten" in human terms to mean that the fetus has had in any sense a life of equal duration to that of the one in whom or by whom he/she was begotten. The dichotomy made by Trinitarians between "created" and "begotten" is self-serving and intended to explain how in some sense Jesus can be God's "Son" or even "only-begotten" or "firstborn," without being "created." Though some distinction can be made between these terms, ultimately what is meant is that the one begotten or created is given life by another. Beyond this, however, the actual spiritual or heavenly 'birth' or creation process is beyond our experience, and so it is understandable only by analogy. That is precisely why the Bible uses terms like "firstborn" and other birth or creation terms that we can use in relating to the relationship between God and the prehuman Jesus. Therefore, the use of such terms in describing Jesus' relationship with his Father strongly suggests some event took place which constituted the Logos "only-begotten," "firstborn," and God's "Son," and which resulted in the Father being "the Father" and *not* "Son." Bowman (*Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 83) argues, "The Bible does not actually *say* that the prehuman Jesus was begotten by the Father *at some point in time*." But it does not say the Logos was begotten *outside of time* either! The Bible teaches that the prehuman Jesus was 'begotten' or 'created' (according to Prov 8:22ff.), which is everywhere else understood in such relationships to take place "in time" (see pages 370-377 above, and Chapter 3, note 95, page 268-269).

⁸⁶ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 60.

⁸⁷ Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, page 61.

But in Proverbs 8:22 Jehovah's Witnesses are not suggesting that one subject is spoken of with part of the text applied prophetically to a *different* subject (namely, to the man Jesus of Nazareth). Further, the latter part of 2 Samuel 7:14 (which speaks of "doing wrong") is never applied to Jesus. However, Proverbs 8:22 presents a being who was "created" first by Jah (see below), and who was then 'with Jah' when he made "all things." That is precisely how the prehuman Jesus is described in the NT in texts such as John 1:1-3, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Colossians 1:15-17, and Hebrews 1:2-3.

Regarding Bowman's other objections to Proverbs 8:22-31 as a description of the pre-human Jesus, it should be noted that there is a difference between the very personal "Wisdom" described in Proverbs 8 and the impersonal attribute of "wisdom" that is spoken of elsewhere in the same biblical book. Indeed, the only time Wisdom speaks with the introductory formula, "I, [חָכְמָה, 'ani], Wisdom," is in Proverbs 8:12. This is one reason why Jehovah's Witnesses do not view other attributes mentioned in the same text (such as "prudence" ["shrewdness" in NWT]) as a personal being the way Wisdom is clearly presented as a living, personal being. Indeed, "prudence" *never* speaks in the context of Proverbs 8.

Therefore, when the text says Wisdom "resided" with "prudence," it seems to mean that the speaker ("Wisdom") has "prudence" as a dominant attribute. As noted by Keil and Delitzsch, "Wisdom inhabits prudence, has settled down, as it were, and taken up her residence in it, is at home in its whole sphere, and rules it."⁸⁸ "Prudence" or "shrewdness" in Proverbs 8:12 is a real attribute, not a personal being as is "Wisdom." However, "wisdom" as an impersonal attribute (NWT: "practical wisdom") is used in Proverbs 8:14. This lends further support to the identification of "Wisdom" as a real personal being in Proverbs 8, for it shows the figure of "Wisdom" *has* "practical wisdom!"⁸⁹

⁸⁸ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 6, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1993), page 177.

⁸⁹ Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) does something very similar, in that it opens (1:1) by referring to the attribute of wisdom ("all wisdom") as 'with Jah forever.' But then it switches to the personal being of Wisdom in 1:4, "Wisdom has been created before all [other] things" (underlining added; see my notes 78 and 79).

Regarding Bowman's third objection, namely, that 'Wisdom actually would have to reside in a house with seven pillars according to Proverbs 9:1 in order to be a personal being in 8:12-36,' I will simply respond by noting that Proverbs 9:1-4 reverts back to a rather impersonal view of wisdom in part by referring to it in the third person. Also, there is a marked difference in the style and in the imagery of Proverbs 8:22-31 and what we find in "the instructions and other wisdom poems."⁹⁰

Indeed, Whybray isolates two sections of Proverbs (1:20-33 and 8:1-36) that present Wisdom in a much different light than what we find in other parts of this book. Whybray then writes:

The portrayal of Wisdom in 1.20-33 and ch. 8 is not the same as in the instructions. She is no longer spoken of in the third person, but is herself a speaker: apart from the short introductions which set the scene (1.20-21; 8:1-3), the whole of these two long poems consists of her words, which she delivers in public. Instead of being a shadowy if important figure, she now appears as a fully fledged character.⁹¹

The vivid description Wisdom gives of actual historical events that occurred while in association with Jah "from times earlier than the earth" (8:23) dramatically sets Proverbs 8 apart from the rest of the book. Indeed, Whybray notes that, in contrast to ancient Egyptian and Babylonian creation accounts the temporal clauses in Proverbs 8:22-31 "constitute an ordered statement of the actual creative process," an "orderly and detailed ... presentation of the events of creation."⁹² There is but one other being who shares the same descriptions given to Wisdom in Proverbs 8, and that is the Word who became Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1; 14). Consider:

⁹⁰ R.N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), page 44.

⁹¹ Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, page 35. See also, Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pages 71-74.

⁹² R.N. Whybray, "Proverbs VIII 22-31 and its Supposed Prototypes," *VT* 15.4 (1965), pages 507-508. On page 511 Whybray notes that the creation of the earth is not the main point of Prov 8:22-31, but rather "the priority of wisdom over the other creatures" (underlining added).

Figure 5.4

Parallels Between “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8 and Jesus in the NT

PARALLELS	BIBLICAL TEXTS
1) They are the first of God’s works.	Wisdom: Prov 8:22. Jesus: Col 1:15; Rev 3:14.
2) They existed with God before the creation of the earth.	Wisdom: Prov 8:23-29. Jesus: Joh 1:1, 17:5.
3) They were present during creation.	Wisdom: Prov 8:30. Jesus: Joh 1:3; Heb 1:2; 1Co 8:6.
4) They have a special fondness for mankind.	Wisdom: Prov 8:31. Jesus: Joh 3:16; 10:17; 1Ti 2:5, 6.
5) They are associated in a special way with “life.”	Wisdom: Prov 8:35. Jesus: Joh 14:6; 17:3.
6) They are both specially loved by Jah the Father.	Wisdom: Prov 8:30. Jesus: Lu 3:22; Joh 3:35; 5:20; 17:24.

In addition to the above parallels, in Chapter 4 (pages 314-315) I presented parallels between the Johannine Logos (the prehuman Jesus) and the figure of Wisdom in various biblical and non-biblical texts from the ancient world. But of more weight than all of these significant parallels is the fact that in the NT Jesus *identifies himself* as “Wisdom.” In the NWT of Matthew 23:34-36, Jesus is recorded as saying the following to his disciples (with underlining added):

For this reason, here I [Jesus] am sending forth to YOU prophets and wise men and public instructors. Some of them YOU will kill and impale, and some of them YOU will scourge in YOUR synagogues and persecute from city to city; that there may come upon YOU all the righteous blood spilled on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zech·a·ri’ah son of Bar·a·chi’ah, whom YOU murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to YOU, All these things will come upon this generation.

In Luke 11:49-51 this same account is presented as follows (with underlining added):

On this account the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send forth to them prophets and apostles, and they will kill and persecute some of them, so that the blood of all the prophets spilled from the founding of the world may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel down to the blood of Zech'a-ri'ah, who was slain between the altar and the house.' Yes, I tell YOU, it will be required from this generation.

Here we have an explicit identification of Jesus as "the wisdom of God."⁹³ Further, in Matthew 11:19 Jesus says the following according to the NWT:

"[T]he Son of man did come eating and drinking, still people say, 'Look! A man gluttonous and given to drinking wine, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' All the same, wisdom is proved righteous by its [Greek: *autes*] works."

Here Jesus again identifies himself as "wisdom," the one whose "works" show that he is righteous in spite of those who claim otherwise. NWT translates the Greek pronoun in reference to "wisdom" as "its," but since "wisdom" is a feminine noun *autes* should be translated "her." References to "Wisdom" in Proverbs or here in the NT as a "her" no more reveal Wisdom's "gender" than does using the feminine gender word *agape* ("love") in 1 John 4:8 for God. The point of Matthew 11:19 is similar, namely, "Wisdom here is clearly identified with Jesus the man who performed these deeds."⁹⁴ Kampen goes on to explain:

The parallel text in Luke 7:35 refers to ["all of her children"] at this point: "yet wisdom is justified by all her children." In this case the author wants to establish that it is the deeds which

⁹³ The Diatessaron of Tatian (a sort of Gospel harmony that was originally written in Syriac in the mid-second century CE) makes this identification even more explicit in 41:1. There Jesus is recorded as saying, "I, the wisdom of God, send ..." (J. Hamlyn Hill, *The Earliest Life of Christ Ever Compiled from the Four Gospels Being the Diatessaron of Tatian* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1894], pages 205, 310 [underlining added]). See also ANF 9, page 106, sec. 41.1.

⁹⁴ John Kampen, "Aspects of Wisdom in the Gospel of Matthew in Light of the New Qumran Evidence," in *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*, ed. F. Garcia Martinez and A.S. Van Der Woude, vol. 35, *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pages 235-236.

justify the identification of Jesus with wisdom and which provide the basis for the claim made by the author of this gospel later in this chapter. The emphasis on deeds makes the connection to the messianic era and establishes Jesus as the authoritative representative of God's reign. While the connection of Jesus with wisdom is clearly established, the author also provides a very particular definition for the connection, not simply an identification of Jesus with the wisdom tradition. The utilization of Lady Wisdom follows immediately hereafter at the end of Chapter 11, a section which has frequently played a role in Christian diatribes against Jews: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." As evidence of the use of wisdom imagery in this passage the parallels with Sira [Sirach] 51:23-27 frequently have been noted.⁹⁵

There are other parallels between "Wisdom" in ancient biblical and non-biblical traditions and what we read about Jesus in the NT. For example, Wisdom 8:1 describes Wisdom as 'ordering all things.' Similarly, Hebrews 1:3 speaks of Jesus as 'sustaining all things by the word of his power.' In Wisdom 6:1, 12-22 the kings of the earth are called to "love" (verse 12) and to "honor" (verse 21) Wisdom. These parallel the thoughts expressed in Psalm 2:12, in John 5:23, and in Philippians 2:10, concerning Jesus.

Finally, in the same way that Paul references Isaiah 40:13 in 1 Corinthians 2:16 ('For who has come to know the mind of Jah') and concludes that while no one has Jah's mind "we do have the mind of Christ," in Wisdom 9:13 there is a similar use of Isaiah 40:13. Then in Wisdom 9:17 we read, "And your counsel who has known,

⁹⁵ Kampen, "Aspects of Wisdom in the Gospel of Matthew in Light of the New Qumran Evidence," page 236. Sirach 53 introduces the figure of Wisdom and then in verses 23-27 reads (according to Brenton's translation):

Draw near unto me, ye unlearned, and dwell in the house of learning. Wherefore are ye slow, and what say ye of these things, seeing your souls are very thirsty? I opened my mouth, and said, Buy her for yourselves without money. Put your neck under the yoke, and let your soul receive instruction: she is hard at hand to find. Behold with your eyes, how that I have had but little labour, and have gotten unto me much rest.

except that you give Wisdom and send your holy spirit from above?" I capitalize "Wisdom" here because Wisdom is a person throughout this book. Indeed, here in Wisdom 9:17 there is a clear parallel with 1 Corinthians 2:16, in that while we do not know Jah's mind or will (fully) we do know it through "Wisdom" and the holy spirit, just we do according to Paul through "Christ."⁹⁶

In Proverbs 8:22, Wisdom is said to have been "begotten" or "created" by Jah God. These concepts are also consistent with what we read about Jesus in the NT, namely, that he is God's "only-begotten" and "firstborn." But are "begotten" and "created" accurate translations of the Hebrew verb *qanah*, used in the LXX of Proverbs 8:22? Bruce Vawter conducted a study of *qanah* in the OT, particularly as it is used in Proverbs 8:22, and he concluded that there is "no compelling evidence from other OT texts to indicate a Hebrew *qana* = 'created,' neither should the verb in Prov 8:22 be translated in this fashion."⁹⁷

Vawter believes the evidence shows that Wisdom preexisted the created order and that Jah "took possession of a wisdom that he then proceeded to utilize in his work of creation."⁹⁸ Viewed in this way, "possessed" might seem like an acceptable translation of *qanah* in Proverbs 8:22. But Vawter's theory does not fit well with understanding *'amon* as "nursling" in Proverbs 8:30 (NWT: "master worker"), which might indicate a youthful, childlike relationship

⁹⁶ Additionally, Jeffrey S. Lamp, "Wisdom in Col 1:15-20: Contribution and Significance," *JETS* 41.1 (1998), pages 50-51, points to a number of parallels between Col 1:15-20 and ancient Jewish Wisdom traditions. While I am not sure Lamp understands the true significance of these parallels for NT Christology (note his reference to the "Arian controversy" on page 52), he is right in calling attention to many parallels between Wisdom and Jesus.

⁹⁷ Bruce Vawter, "Prov. 8:22: Wisdom and Creation," *JBL* 99 (1980), page 213. In his later article, "Yahweh: Lord of the Heavens and the Earth," *CBQ* 48.3 (1986), page 463, Vawter defends the position in his *JBL* article by writing, "I proposed and still propose that there is no evidence that the common Semitic $\sqrt{qnh}/y/w$ ever demands a translation which associates its root meaning with that of 'creation' or 'procreation.'" I agree with Richard Clifford (*Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* [CBQMS 26; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994], page 118, note 7) when he writes that Vawter's "argument is forced, particularly so in Deut 32:6 ('Surely He is your father who created you [*qaneka*], // He made you and established you')." The context is the key in determining the meaning of *qanah*, and in Deut 32:6, Prov 8:22, and in other OT texts, the context clearly refers to creation or birth, whether figurative or literal.

⁹⁸ Vawter, "Wisdom and Creation," page 215.

between Wisdom and Jah from ancient times. Understanding *ʾamon* as “nursling” also does not explain why Jah would “take possession of a wisdom.” So what does *ʾamon* mean?

R.B.Y. Scott acknowledges the appropriateness of “little child” as a translation of *ʾamon*, particularly in view of Proverbs 8:22 (which Scott translates, “Yahweh begat me”) and the use of the same verbs in Psalm 139:13. However, Scott believes the “imagery of gay, thoughtless childhood is inappropriate” in view of the “appeal to men to listen to wisdom [in the first part of the chapter and in verses 32-36] because of her primacy in creation.”⁹⁹ But this seems to miss the point entirely if it is in fact Wisdom’s relation to Jah as a child which makes “her” so dear to him as “the one he was specially fond of day by day” (NWT). By the time of men, she would obviously have grown, particularly after learning from Jah (compare John 5:20), and so she would not be anything like the “thoughtless child” Scott describes! Her existence from “times earlier than the earth” (verse 23) has allowed her to obtain the wisdom and knowledge from Jah which she so eagerly desires to give mankind.

Scott rejects “master worker” and similar translations for *ʾamon*, believing this would conflict “with the express statements that Yahweh himself performed the creative acts.”¹⁰⁰ But this does not conflict with certain ways of understanding Wisdom’s role in creation, all of which are consistent with the role of the Word (Jesus) in creation in the NT. If Wisdom in Proverbs Chapter 8 is a “master worker” then Jah could still be viewed as the one who alone “performed the creative acts” and also have one “with” him who ‘worked’ in a manner similar to a child who eagerly “works” for his father, and who does so skillfully at his direction.—Compare Jesus’ role as “the carpenter’s son” in Matthew 13:55, and as “the carpenter” in Mark 6:3.

In one sense Joseph is responsible for what he and Jesus made together, since he either directed or instructed Jesus in this trade. But at some point Jesus would have been able to complete work at a skilled, ‘masterful’ level, which is surely similar with

⁹⁹ R.B.Y. Scott, “Wisdom in Creation: the *ʾamon* of Proverbs viii 30,” VT 10.2 (1960), pages 217-219.

¹⁰⁰ Scott, “Wisdom in Creation,” pages 216-217, 220.

the work of Wisdom/the Word in creation, under the Father's direction.—Proverbs 8:27-31; Hebrews 1:2.

Since in Proverbs Chapter 8 Jah is created not only "Wisdom" (8:22) but also "the heavens" (8:27) and "his earth [Hebrew: אֶרֶץ] (8:29 [underlining added]), no matter how much of a "master worker" Wisdom was all of it is due to Jah first creating Wisdom so that Wisdom "came to be beside him" (8:30). Wisdom as a "master worker" may therefore mean she worked with those things Jah brought into existence after her.¹⁰¹ Consistency can be established between the roles of the Creator and the "master worker" in Proverbs 8 and the roles of the Father and the Son according to texts such as John 1:1-3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:15-17, and Hebrews 1:2, texts which also differentiate the roles of the Father and the Son in creation.

However, if instead of "master worker" *ʾamon* means "little child" (Whybray) or "nursling," then rather than a parallel with the NT's presentation of the Father and the Son in the creation of "all things," the parallel between Wisdom in Proverbs 8:30 and Jesus in the NT could involve his being a child of God, his Son, the only-begotten. As Victor Hurowitz has argued:

Wisdom grew up in three stages, corresponding with three ages in the history of the world. She was conceived and born before creation, present at the time of creation, and went out into the world when creation was complete with the appearance of human beings. In fact, the story of Wisdom is her narration of her own life and her maturation process. It is in this context that we must find the primary meaning of [*ʾamon*]. Since every other statement of hers relates to her gestation, birth, early childhood, and growing up, it seems that [*ʾamon*] too should designate some stage or aspect of this process. It is a life-cycle term. Consistency of context thus weighs heavily in favor of the interpretation "nursling" and the like. ... Wisdom relates that she received her education or early training in the house of the creator of the

¹⁰¹ For further discussion of the possible meanings of *ʾamon*, see the summary by Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study*, pages 76-78; compare Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs* (SBT 45; London: SCM Press, 1965), pages 101-103; Scott, "Wisdom in Creation," pages 213-223; "Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1952, pages 127-128.

universe who was her father and nurse [compare John 8:38], and one may imply thereby that she learned all she could about the cosmic order by watching her parent at work.¹⁰²

Returning to the meaning of *qanah*, I believe Whybray is correct when with direct reference to Vawter he observes: "Scholars who argue that *qanah* in the sense of 'acquired' must imply that Wisdom is here seen as having pre-existed before Yahweh acquired her are reading too much into the text."¹⁰³ A rather striking example of reading one's view into Proverbs 8:22-31 is found in William Irwin's article, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" At the beginning of his article Irwin acknowledges that "Wisdom originated in some way with God long before his work in creating the world." But then Irwin suggests the meaning of verse 23 is "prior to eternity I was established!"¹⁰⁴

There is no good evidence to support Irwin's view. Some time before both Vawter's and Irwin's articles were written, C.F. Burney wrote an article in which he discussed the meaning of *qanah* in Proverbs 8:22 and in the OT in general. Surprisingly, nowhere in Vawter's article is there a reference to Burney's study, which study shows *qanah* never has the sense of "'possess,' or 'own' simply, apart from the idea of possessing something which *has been acquired* in one way or another."¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Burney concluded his article by writing as follows:

The idea of *creation* is closely connected with the idea of *acquisition* as being one form of it; whereas the idea of *possession without acquisition* stands sharply apart, and cannot, as we have seen, be substantiated for a single occurrence of the verb. We are justified, therefore, in concluding that קָנִיתִי [the form of *qanah* used in Proverbs 8:22] cannot rightly be rendered 'possessed me,' but must have the meaning 'gat me'

¹⁰² V.A. Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect? מְנַחֵם and the Role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31," *Bib* 80 (1999), pages 396, 398.

¹⁰³ R.N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), page 130.

¹⁰⁴ William A. Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" *JBL* 80 (1961), pages 133, 140, note 32.

¹⁰⁵ C.F. Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," *JTS* 27 (1925-26), page 160. Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" page 133, note 3, correctly references the publication data of Burney's article, but then uses "Burkitt" in the rest of his study.

in some sense still to be determined. ... We arrive, then, at the following rendering for the verse as a whole:—The Lord begat me as the beginning of His way, The antecedent of His works, of old.¹⁰⁶

The context of Proverbs 8:22 further describes Wisdom's creation by Jah. For example, it refers to Wisdom as "the beginning of [Jah's] way, the earliest of his achievements of long ago" (verse 22), and as one who was "installed from the start" (verse 23) and "brought forth as with labor pains" (verses 24, 25). All of these descriptions, together with the likely meaning of *qanah* itself, strongly suggest a translation for *qanah* such as "created," "begotten," or "produced," not "buy," "get," or "possessed."

In this light, consider what Gale Yee wrote about what is said of Wisdom in several of the texts from Proverbs 8 cited in the preceding paragraph, and in relation to the language and imagery used in other biblical texts:

In Ps 139:13 the psalmist states that he was woven in the womb of his mother. In Job 10:11 Job remarks to God that he was knit together with bones and sinews. The process of gestation in both cases is described metaphorically in terms of a craft. Furthermore, significant for our structural study is the fact that in Ps 139:13 קנה [*qanah*] parallels סך [*sakhak*, "weave together"], which is the same situation here in Prov 8:22-23. While the usual meaning of the root קנה [*qanah*] is »to buy or acquire,« the verb is used in Gen 4:1 and Dtn 32:6 as well as in Ps 139:13 where the parenting aspect is unmistakable. The third parallel verb in Prov 8:24, חוללתי [*kholalti*], »I was brought forth (in labor),« also supports the birth imagery found in קנה [*qanah*] and סך [*sakhak*].¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," pages 164-165, 168.

¹⁰⁷ Gale A. Yee, "An Analysis of Prov 8:22-31 According to Style and Structure," ZAW 94 (1982), page 63, note 17. Jehovah's Witnesses do not share Yee's view that "Wisdom functions as a literary device personifying the abstract concept of Hebrew wisdom," but we do agree there are good reasons for believing Wisdom's "beginning is not only temporally but also qualitatively distinct from the rest of the created world" (Gale A. Yee, "The Theology of Creation in Proverbs 8:22-31," *Creation in the Biblical Traditions* [eds. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins; CBQMS 24; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992], page 91).

As Yee points out, the use of *qanah* in Proverbs 8:22 is similar to Genesis 4:1. Eve clearly did not mean she “acquired” or “bought” Cain, but that she “produced,” “begat,” or even “created” him “with the aid of” Jah. It should also be noted that “the meaning ‘begot’ here must be figurative and so equivalent to ‘created.’ ... The point of this verse, as of the succeeding verse, is merely that wisdom was created *first*.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, there is even an NT text that speaks about the heavenly Jesus in almost exactly this same way.

Revelation 3:14. At this point, in several chapters of this book including this one, I believe I have presented good reasons for concluding the Bible teaches that Jesus of Nazareth preexisted his human life as a spirit “son” of God, as God’s “firstborn” and “only-begotten” Son. Another text which I believe clearly teaches that the pre-human Jesus was the first creation of God is Revelation 3:14. According to the RSV this verse calls Jesus the “beginning of God’s creation” (NWT = “the beginning of the creation by God” [Greek: ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, *he arche tes ktiseos tou theou*]). But does this verse truly refer to Jesus as the “beginning” of God’s creation?

Regarding Jehovah’s Witnesses use of this text, Ron Rhodes writes, “In responding to the Watchtower’s interpretation of Revelation 3:14, it is critical to note there is a wide range of meanings for the Greek word ... translated ‘beginning’ in the *New World Translation*.”¹⁰⁹ While it is true *arche* may mean something other than “beginning,” a check of all of the occurrences of *arche* followed by a genitive expression in the NT (as in Revelation 3:14) shows it always denotes a beginning or first part of something. Even when used without a genitive expression *arche* means “beginning” some 32 times.¹¹⁰

Of the remaining 13 occurrences of *arche* in the NT, 2 are used of the “four corners” (NWT: “extremities”) of the earth. The final 11 are used to denote “governments” or “rulers,” and where such

¹⁰⁸ Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, page 101. For more on the subject of the prehuman Jesus as the figure of “Wisdom” see my more recent article, “Jah Loves Her, Wisdom, His Son, the Word,” *Watching the Ministry* (October 18, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 123.

¹¹⁰ See Matt 19:4, 8; 24:21; Mr 1:1; 10:6; Lu 1:2; Joh 1:1, 2; 6:64; 8:25, 44; 15:27; 16:4; Ac 11:15; 26:4; Col 1:18; 2Th 2:13; Heb 1:10; 2:3; 3:14; 1Jo 1:1; 2:7, 13, 14, 24; 3:8, 11; 2Jo 1:5, 6; Jude 6; Rev 21:6; 22:13.

meanings are intended *arche* in the NT is always used with other expressions that denote "power" (δύναμις, *dynamis*) or "authority" (ἐξουσία, *exousia*).¹¹¹

Based on the above information, the use of the singular *arche* in general and when used with a genitive expression specifically support "beginning" as the meaning of *arche* in Revelation 3:14. In spite of these good reasons based on the use of the word in question, Rhodes writes, "The authoritative *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich says the meaning of *arche* in Revelation 3:14 is 'first cause.'"¹¹²

Though "BAGD" (2nd ed. [1979]) does list Revelation 3:14 under definition "2. the first cause" (page 112), in this same edition we read, "the [meaning] beginning=first created is linguistically poss[ible]." In fact, in the 3rd edition of this lexicon ("BDAG" [2000]) this same entry (page 138) now includes "*the beginning*" and instead of "possible" it considers "beginning" as the "probable" (underlining added) meaning of *arche* in Revelation 3:14. In this light, consider these NT parallels:

Matthew 24:8 (*arche* *odinon*), "beginning of birth pangs":

"Beginning" (*arche*) here refers back to "all these things" (*panta ... tauta*) which refer to the signs listed in verses 4-7. These signs are a "beginning" of the signs which Jesus gives in response to the disciple's questions in verse 3. The genitive here is therefore partitive in that the "birth pangs" are the whole of which the *arche* of the "signs" in verses 4-7 is the first part.

Mark 13:19 (*arches ktiseos*), "beginning of creation":

Here "beginning" is likely a reference to the beginning of the creation of humankind. See pages 372-377 for a discussion of some of the relevant

¹¹¹ Lu 12:11; 20:20; Ro 8:38; 1Co 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10; 2:15; Tit 3:1

¹¹² Rhodes, *Reasoning*, page 123. Rhodes (*Reasoning*, page 124) also argues that "beginning" as used of God in Rev 1:8, 21:6, and 22:13 "does not mean that [God] had a created beginning." But Rev 1:8 does not use *arche* in reference to God, and the word "creation" is not used with *arche* in Rev 21:6 or in 22:13, while it is used in a genitive expression following *arche* in Rev 3:14. In Rev 21:6 and in 22:13 *arche* appears to be used of God as the "beginning" of all that he purposes to do or that he permits others to do, all of which also therefore 'end' with him. In this way, God can be the "beginning" and the "ending" according to his will, without himself being a created "beginning."

types of 'beginnings' presented in the Bible, and the reasons supporting different understandings for the creative parts of the "beginning" of Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1.

John 2:11 (*archen ton semeion*), "beginning of the/his signs":

Here "beginning" indicates the first of Jesus' signs.

Philippians 4:15 (*arche tou evangeliou*), "beginning of the good news":

Here "beginning" refers to the "start" (NWT) of Paul's "declaring the good news" when he "departed from Macedonia."

Hebrews 3:14 (*ten archen tes hypostseos*), "the confidence^[113] we had at the beginning":

The translation of this part of Hebrews 3:14 is not so clear. That which is here referred to as "beginning" is characterized by the meaning of *hypastaseos* (NWT's "confidence"), so it involves *the start* of a person's trust or confidence in the good news.

Hebrews 5:12 (*tes arches ton logion tou theou*), "the beginning of the words of God":

Note the similarity between this verse and Revelation 3:14: There is a partitive genitive (namely, "of the words") with "the beginning" (*tes arches*) that is considered part of "the words" used with *arche* and followed by a genitive of origin. This means the "words" are "of/by God" (*tou theou*). The "elementary things" (*ta stoicheia*) are a part of the "beginning" [*arche*] or "first" things that are taught to a new believer, the "milk" of verse 13.

Hebrews 6:1 (*ton tes arches tou christou logon*), "the teaching of the first things [NWT: 'primary doctrine'] concerning Christ":

¹¹³ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC 47A; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1991), page 82, note q, objects to "confidence" as a proper meaning for *hypastaseos* "since examples of the word with this nuance cannot be found in early sources." But this nuance fits quite well in Heb 3:14, since "confidence" or "trust" (both meanings are accepted by J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), page 376, entry 31.84]) can move a person to take the first step in rejecting "fear" and "sin.—Heb 3:12-13.

Here the reference is to those things that are foundational or 'first' where it concerns faith in Jesus. Upon such things a Christian's faith is then 'built up' as it matures through life.

Hebrews 7:3 (*archen hemeron*), "*a beginning of days*":

Here "beginning" refers to a traceable "start" for Melchizedek, who is "without genealogy."

2 Peter 3:4 (*ap' arches ktiseos*), "*from the beginning of creation*":

See my comments above under **Mark 13:19**.

There are also plenty of examples from the Greek OT (LXX) which show how *arche* regularly meant "beginning" or "first."¹¹⁴ Indeed, after acknowledging that "beginning=first created" is a possible alternative to the definition "first cause" (as noted above), the 2nd edition of BAGD (1979) refers to the article by C.F. Burney which I cited earlier in connection with Jesus' identity as the Wisdom of Proverbs 8:22.

Burney believes Revelation 3:14 is an allusion to Proverbs 8:22. Burney also concludes with reference to the meaning of Revelation 3:14, "[interpreters] have not a shadow of authority for limiting in meaning to 'the source of God's creation.'"¹¹⁵ Whether *arche* means "source," "ruler," or "beginning" in Revelation 3:14, the translation "beginning" is not only credible but, in fact, "probable" (BDAG [2000]).

By contrast, Rhodes believes that Revelation 3:14 means that Christ is "the 'beginner' of God's creation," believing that his interpretation "harmonizes with other New Testament passages about Christ as Creator," among which Rhodes believes are Colossians 1:16, 17, Hebrews 1:2, and John 1:3.¹¹⁶ But in this publication, and in prior editions of this book, I have presented a much different understanding of these texts, namely, one which understands Jesus as the mediator of the Father's creative acts, not as the one who created 'through himself,' for example.

¹¹⁴ See Gen 10:10; 49:3; Ex 12:2; Nu 24:20; De 21:17; Job 40:19; Hosea 1:2.

¹¹⁵ Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," page 177.

¹¹⁶ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, pages 125-126.

In the previous three texts and in 1 Corinthians 8:6 Jesus is presented as the agent “through whom” the Father created, just like Wisdom in Proverbs Chapter 8 (see my prior discussion of this text). Being the one “through whom” another (the Father) creates is *not* the same as being the one who does the actual creating or the one “from whom” creation first comes.

Returning to the discussion of OT LXX grammatical parallels to Revelation 3:14, consider Job 40:19. Here reference is made to “the beginning of the Lord’s creation” (Greek: ἀρχὴ πλάσματος κυρίου, *arche plasmatos kyriou*). Here a form of the Greek word *plasma* is used which can involve something or someone “formed,” such as when Adam was “formed” from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7, 8). In Genesis 2:7, 8 the LXX does in fact use a form of the Greek verb *plasso* (πλάσσω), which means “to form.” In Genesis 2:7, 8 the Hebrew text uses a word which more closely corresponds to *plasso* in terms of “forming” something. But in Job 40:19 the Hebrew text uses a term which refers to the beginning of God’s “ways.” It is, in fact, the same word used to describe the creation of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22.

As for Behemoth, the one called “the beginning of the Lord’s creation,” no one can say what creature it was. But suggestions such as the hippopotamus do not fit well with some of the descriptions given, even in hyperbole. In Job 40:17 Behemoth’s tail is said to ‘bend down like a cedar.’ This does not describe the hippopotamus! Consider, however, the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. Starting with the fifth day of creation, Genesis 1:24 reads: “Let the earth put forth living souls according to their kinds, domestic animal [Hebrew: *Behemah*, singular form of *Behemoth* used in Job 40:19] and moving animal and wild beast of the earth according to its kind” (NWT). The LXX here uses three terms to describe these land animals, one of which is *theria*. I believe this is the LXX’s corresponding word for the Hebrew *Behemah*, as it also is in Job 40:15.

It would appear to be the case, then, that Behemoth was “the beginning of the Lord’s [land] formations/creations.” Indeed, both in the LXX of Job 40:19 and in Genesis 2:19 a form of the Greek verb *plasma* (“to form”) is used where in both cases it seems as if the creatures described are land creatures. This

includes flying creatures which must return to the land. Also, the LXX adds more to the distinction of Behemoth by including the following, "He [Behemoth] was made for the purpose of amusing the angels of [God]." James Strahan notes that while it may be that Behemoth "was the first land animal to be created," Job 40:19 likely regards Behemoth as "God's masterpiece."¹¹⁷ Either meaning includes Behemoth in the "creation" or "formations" of God, whether as its first, as its best, or perhaps as both.

With this in mind, Job 40:19 could certainly be understood relative to the land creations of God that began on the fifth day of creation according to Genesis chapter 1. These land creations are again highlighted in Genesis chapter 2, where the text first speaks of God "forming" animals from the ground to bring to Adam for naming. Perhaps Behemoth was the first animal God brought to Adam because it was the first one God formed from "the ground."—Genesis 2:19.

Both Job 40:19 and Proverbs 8:22 are parallel to Revelation 3:14 in their use of *arche*. So is the LXX of Numbers 24:20 by its use of *arche* for Amalek as "the first [Greek: *arche*] of the nations." Though Amalek is not the first of all the nations chronologically speaking, Amalek was the first nation to fight against Israel after the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17:8). Indeed, the Targums of Onqelos, Neofiti, and Pseudo-Jonathan make this meaning explicit in their translations, namely, "The first of the nations who waged (war) with Israel were the Amalekites."¹¹⁸

I know of no example in the Bible or in literature contemporary with it where *arche* means "origin" or "active cause." To suggest we have just such a use in Revelation 3:14 is special pleading, and the burden of proof is on those who contend that the meaning is different from the above examples of *arche* in the NT and in the LXX.

¹¹⁷ James Strahan, *The Book of Job*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1914), page 339.

¹¹⁸ See the readings in Martin McNamara and Ernest G. Clarke, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 4, *Targum Neofiti 1: Numbers and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995) and Bernard Grossfield, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 8, *The Targum Onqelos to Leviticus and The Targum Onqelos to Numbers* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988).

Finally, in Revelation 3:14 it is said that Jesus is the *arche* of “God’s creation.” Therefore, whatever meaning we give to *arche* in this verse does not negate the fact that Jesus is distinct from “God.” The “creation” referred to in Revelation 3:14 “belongs” to or is “of” or “by” (Greek: *tes* [a genitive of origin]) “*God*,” not “of” or “by” the *arche*!

Those who advocate meanings such as “origin,” “first cause,” or “ruler” for *arche* in Revelation 3:14 must provide examples supporting their position, and also explain the relationship between “God” and the *arche* of *his* creation, that is, before I can accept them rather than “beginning” as descriptions for the prehuman Jesus where it concerns the creation “by God.”

Chapter Summary

The Bible presents Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, as God’s “firstborn” and “only-begotten” who came to the earth in response to God’s will. Jesus had a human life (John 1:14), and a prehuman life (Philippians 2:6-8). He taught his followers that he lived “because of the Father” (John 6:57) and several NT and other biblical texts strongly support his teaching, including Colossians 1:15-17, Proverbs 8:22-31, and Revelation 3:14. The belief of Jehovah’s Witnesses and now by the Christian Witnesses of Jah that God’s Son was created or given life before he became a man is well-founded on the best available reasons, and it is consistent with the overall teaching of the Bible concerning Jesus’ life in heaven and on the earth.

The Bible also tells us Jesus is “the Word of God,” and that he existed “with” Jah before all things were created (John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). He is the beloved “firstborn” of God whom all will honor and worship as God permits, even as he commands (Hebrews 1:6). Through this one God made all other things, that is, all things other than the one he himself made directly, without a mediator. But once the Son was given life, “all things” were made through him and “for him,” as he is the “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2). This one was “glad before [Jah] all the time, being glad at the

productive land of [Jah's] earth, and the things [Wisdom] was fond of were with the sons of men."—Proverbs 8:30-31.

Jehovah's Witnesses are consistent with the Bible on the person of Jesus. This is true not only where it concerns the biblical teaching about what he was like before he came to the earth, but also concerning what he was like during his human life and what the Bible teaches about him since his resurrection. For example, the Bible tells us that since his resurrection Jesus is a "life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45) and that as such he has a body much different from when he was a man. But Jehovah's Witnesses are often criticized by Trinitarians and by others for teaching such things. In the next chapter I will present the issues and defend the good reasons used by Jehovah's Witnesses in support of some of our other beliefs about Jesus since his resurrection, and about the resurrection body described in the NT.

6

“The Temple of His Body”

In John 2:19-21 we read: “In answer Jesus said to them: ‘Break down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Therefore the Jews said: ‘This temple was built in forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was talking about the temple of his body.” This account is used by some to prove that Jesus rose from the dead in the same body in which he died, and that he possesses this same body in heaven today. According to Ron Rhodes, in John 2:19-21 Jesus said here that “He would be raised from the dead bodily, not as a spirit creature.”¹

It is true Jesus spoke of rising from the dead in a “body,” but is this body the same *human* body that he had when he died? Is this what John 2:19-21 teaches? What else does the Bible say about Jesus’ resurrection body? In this chapter I will answer these and other questions about Jesus’ resurrection body, as I present and defend the beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Christian Witness of Jah concerning Jesus’ resurrection body.

In this chapter references to “resurrection” or to a “resurrection body,” unless otherwise indicated, refer to the resurrection of those who will rule as “kings” with Jesus according to numerous NT texts (for example, Luke 12:32; John 14:2-3; 1 Corinthians 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:9-10; 14:1-3). The Bible calls this the “first resurrection,” where those raised to life will be “priests of God and of the Christ, and rule with him for the thousand years.”—Revelation 20:4-6.

¹ Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1993), page 188.

Jesus' Body

The biblical teaching. Jehovah's Witnesses believe and teach that Jesus of Nazareth was raised to life in a body. But *in what kind of body* was Jesus raised? This question really is not new at all. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:35 Paul represents several questions people during his time were asking, including (with underlining added): "How are the dead to be raised up? Yes, with what sort of body are they coming?" In the case of Jesus, is the body in which he was raised the exact same body he had during his human life and at the time of his death?

As noted previously, some who answer yes to the last question in the preceding paragraph would cite John 2:19-21 as evidence in support of their belief. But it should be pointed out that far from being evidence in support of such a view, John 2:19-21 is actually evidence that Jesus was *not* raised to life in a human body (though he certainly appeared in one [see discussion below]). The reasons for my view will be provided after I first examine several NT texts that are directly related to what we read about in John 2:19-21. For example, consider Mark 14:55-58:

Meantime the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they were not finding any. Many, indeed, were giving false witness against him, but their testimonies were not in agreement. Also, certain ones were rising and bearing false witness against him, saying: "We heard him [Jesus] say, 'I will throw down this temple that was made with hands and in three days I will build another not made with hands.'" [Underlining added.]

After Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane he was taken before the Sanhedrin. Several witnesses were then brought forth who falsely accused Jesus of threatening to tear down the literal temple in Jerusalem, when in fact Jesus was really talking about "the temple of his body" (John 2:21). But in one of the false witnesses' testimony we are given a bit more insight about what Jesus likely, actually said.

Though the Jews misunderstood what Jesus *meant* by "tear down this temple and in three days I will raise it up," they did not

falsely represented what Jesus *said*. If their representation of what Jesus said was true, in spite of their false witness about the literal temple, then the body Jesus said would be raised was not the same body that was ‘torn down.’ The body Jesus had when he was put to death was a body “made with hands.” But the body Jesus was given by God after being raised up was “another [ἄλλον, *allon*] not made with hands,” according to Mark 14:58.

The added description of “not made with hands” matches the language used by Paul regarding the resurrection body, namely, “a house not made with hands, everlasting in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). Paul’s description is in direct comparison with the present, “earthly tent.” Yet, Matthew’s record of the false witnesses’ testimony does not mention anything about ‘another temple not made with hands’ (Matthew 26:61). It is possible Mark simply added these words to the testimony of the false witnesses because the added description more accurately reflected “the sense in which he and his fellow-Christians understood Christ’s saying.”²

It is also possible that these witnesses accurately represented the entirety of Jesus’ words, but falsely applied them to what he said about the literal temple in Jerusalem, that is, rather than to “the temple of his body.” Either way, the description the false witnesses give of the “temple” Jesus spoke about matches what we read about the resurrection body of Christians elsewhere in the NT.

“A house not made with hands.” How, then, can anyone know whether the testimony of the “false witnesses” concerning what Jesus *said* is correct, particularly when we know that *their understanding* of what he said was false? As noted in the previous paragraph, there is a particular NT text which describes the resurrection body in basically the exact same way that we find the false witnesses of Mark 14:56-58 presenting Jesus’ description of the body that would be raised. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-3 we are told the following about the resurrection body (with underlining added):

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan,

² Marcus Dods, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1979), page 442.

longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked [NASB].

The description the apostle Paul gives to the resurrection body here matches perfectly with the body Jesus is said to have been given (Mark 14:58). If they are the same type of body, that is, one “not made with hands,” then Jesus was not raised in the very same body in which he died. Jesus could still take the body in which he died and present it to God, or even materialize it and then continue to use it as the NT teaches he did at times (see the next section).

Yet, like the resurrection bodies of those to whom Paul wrote, Jesus was raised and given a body “not made with hands.” That is why in John 2:21 we do not read, ‘He was talking about the temple of his *physical* body.’ We are only told that Jesus spoke of “the temple of his body.” The “body” Jesus had before he died was “made with hands.” The “body” in which he was raised was one “not made with hands.”

Paul also described the resurrection body as “from heaven.” In contrast, our “earthly tent” is in the likeness of the first man, Adam, who was made from the dust (Genesis 2:7). Therefore, Jesus’ followers likely understood his words in John 2:19-21 to mean that he would “destroy the Temple that is made with hands, and in three days he will build another, not made with hands [footnote refers to Mark 14:58].”³ Elements of this same understanding can be found in the writings of others who lived after the death of the apostles. Consider the words of Cyprian (c. 205—258 CE) who when referring to Jesus’ words in John 2:19 wrote: “Also in the Gospel the Lord says: ... ‘After three days another shall be raised up without hands.’”⁴

The body “made with hands” is clearly much different from the body that is “from heaven.” Paul also wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:1 that this “earthly house” (the present physical body) would be “dissolved” (NWT), “demolished” (Barclay), or “destroyed” (NIV). This shows the complete separation from the house “made with

³ Lucius Nereparampil, *Destroy This Temple: An Exegetico-Theological Study on the Meaning of Jesus’ Temple-Logion in John 2:19* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1978), page 87.

⁴ *The Treatise of Cyprian*, ANF 5, page 511, testimony 15 (emphasis added).

hands” to the one “not made with hands,” for the latter house is described further as “*everlasting* in the heavens.” Having this new “house” also does not appear to limit the owner’s ability to take on the same form that was “dissolved,” especially if we are discussing the Lord Jesus of Nazareth (and, of course, I am). In the next section I will discuss several appearances of Jesus since his resurrection, and what these appearances tell us about the “kind of body” he has in heaven today.

Post-Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

“A spirit does not have flesh and bones.” In Luke 24 several of Jesus’ post resurrection appearances to his disciples are recorded. During the last of these, Jesus appears suddenly to his disciples as they are discussing one of his earlier appearances. When Jesus appears before them the account tells us that the disciples “were terrified, and had imagined they beheld a spirit” (Luke 24:37). But what is it in this account that would have caused them to think that they were seeing a spirit? Also, if it was Jesus whom they saw, then why were they frightened of him? Or did they believe that an evil, *demonic* spirit was trying to trick them?

To help answer these questions, I will first examine the word “spirit” (πνεῦμα, *pneuma*) as it is used elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke. Note the following (with underlining added to each verse):

Luke 4:33: Now in the synagogue there was a man with a spirit [*pneuma*], an unclean demon [*daimonion*].

Luke 8:29: (For he had been ordering the unclean spirit [*pneuma*] to come out of the man. For over a long time it had held him fast, and he was repeatedly bound with chains and fetters under guard, but he would burst the bonds and be driven by the demon [*daimonion*] into the lonely places.)

Luke 9:39: And, look! a spirit [*pneuma*] takes him, and suddenly he cries out, and it throws him into convulsions with foam, and it scarcely withdraws from him after bruising him.

Luke 9:42: But even as he was approaching, the demon [*daimonion*] dashed him to the ground and violently convulsed him. However, Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit [*pneuma*] and healed the boy and delivered him to his father.⁵

From the above examples it is clear that a reference to “a spirit” frequently meant a *demonic* spirit. The fact that the disciples were frightened and had become terrified of Jesus’ appearance also shows they thought a demon stood in their midst. Interestingly, Ignatius (who died sometime during Trajan’s reign [98—117 CE]) wrote the following to the Smyrnaeans (3:2): “For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the resurrection; and when he came to Peter and those with him, he said to them: ‘Take hold of me; handle me and see that I am not a disembodied demon [οὐκ εἰμὶ δαιμόνιον ἄσώματον].’”⁶

The best evidence, in particular from Luke’s account, supports understanding Jesus’ words about not being a “spirit” to mean he was not a demonic spirit. From the available works of later writers such as Ignatius, it is clear that while he believed in the physical resurrection of Jesus, Ignatius also believed “spirit” in Luke 24:39 meant a demonic spirit, as it does elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel.⁷

Jesus’ appearance to Mary. In Luke 24:39 Jesus reassured his disciples he was not a demonic spirit whom they should fear. To prove this, he manifested a physical body to those in the room just as angels had also done in earlier times.⁸ In fact, in the Bible Jesus materializes different physical bodies on different occasions after his resurrection. After Mary tells two angels in Jesus’ tomb she did not know where his body had been taken, we read:

⁵ See Matt 12:43; Mr 1:12, 26; 5:2, 8; 7:25; 9:17, 20, 25; Acts 16:16; 19:15, 16.

⁶ J.R. Harmer and J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2d ed., Revised by Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992). The footnote to this passage reads, “the (now lost) *Gospel According to the Hebrews* and the *Teaching* [or possibly *Preaching*] of Peter are reported to have contained the same (or a very similar) saying.”

⁷ See Smyrnaeans 3:2. Interesting in this light is the fact that Ignatius nowhere comments on or refers to Paul’s discussion of the resurrection body in 1Co 15:35-50 or in 2Co 5:1-8. See also my more recent article, “A Spirit Does Not Have Flesh and Bones”: Another Application of Luke 24:39,” *Watching the Ministry* (February 23, 2011).

⁸ Compare Gen 19:1-3 (where in verse 3 we are told that the angels “went to eating”) with Lu 24:42-43, where Jesus also eats with his disciples after his resurrection.

After saying these things, she turned back and viewed Jesus standing, but she did not discern it was Jesus. Jesus said to her: “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” She, imagining it was the gardener, said to him: “Sir, if you have carried him off, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her: “Mary!” Upon turning around, she said to him, in Hebrew: “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher!”) Jesus said to her: “Stop clinging to me. For I have not yet ascended to the Father. But be on your way to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and YOUR Father and to my God and YOUR God’” [John 20:14-17; underlining added].

Even though Mary “viewed Jesus standing,” she “did not discern it was Jesus.” Why? The only explanation that fits with what we read is that she did not recognize the person standing there as Jesus, at least not based on his physical appearance alone or by the first sound of his voice. Jesus was in a different form, one which Mary mistook as “the gardener.” It was only after Jesus spoke her name a certain way that she responded with recognition. The biblical evidence shows Jesus was not an evil spirit, but he could and he did use different physical forms. The Bible also shows Jesus had the power to keep others from recognizing him.

“Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” Another occasion where Jesus was not recognized by his disciples is recorded in Luke 24:13-35. Verses 13-16 read: “But, look! on that very day two of them were journeying to a village about seven miles distant from Jerusalem and named Emmaus, and they were conversing with each other over all these things that had come about. Now as they were conversing and discussing, Jesus himself approached and began walking with them; but their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (underlining added). But how were they “kept from recognizing him”? Was it by supernatural power, or because he appeared in a different body?

The account in Luke says that Jesus “approached and began walking with them,” though the disciples were still not able to recognize him. In other accounts where a similar phenomenon occurs (such as in John 20:14-17) it is the *appearance* of Jesus that causes confusion about his identity. It may be, as Albert Barnes

points out, that in Luke's account the eyes of the disciples were kept or "holden" (KJV) in that the disciples simply "did not know who he was."⁹ Barnes then further remarks about this account:

It does not appear that there was anything supernatural or miraculous in it; or that God used any power to blind them. It may easily be accounted for without any such supposition, for (1) Jesus appeared *in another form*, (Mark xvi. 12;) i.e. in an appearance different from his usual appearance. (2) They were not *expecting* to see him—indeed they did not suppose that he was alive, and it required the strongest evidence to convince them that he was really risen from the dead.¹⁰

The empty tomb. There is no question the NT teaches that Jesus materialized different physical bodies, which is why at times he was recognized and why at times he was not recognized. But what, then, happened to the body in which Jesus died? Charles Venn Pilcher offers the following explanation: "What was the connection between the earthly Body of the Lord and His Risen Body? We most certainly believe in the Empty Grave. The earthly Body must have been dissolved or changed."¹¹

Regardless of what natural or supernatural processes Jah may have allowed or caused relative to Jesus' body, we know from the NT that God would not allow his "flesh" to "see corruption" (Acts 2:31; 13:36-37). Therefore, before Jesus' body decomposed on its own it would have been removed from the tomb. But was it "removed" because God raised up his Son in the same body in which he died, or because God or Jesus took the body from the tomb in some other way?

⁹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, one volume ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1962), page 257.

¹⁰ Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, page 257. It should be pointed out that Mr 16:12 is part of the longer ending of Mark's Gospel and, though it has support from a variety of ancient witnesses (including A and D), it is lacking in some important ones (including \aleph and B). Still, even if it is not original the manuscripts supporting the longer reading show that it was believed fairly early on in the Gospel tradition that Jesus had appeared after his resurrection in "another form."

¹¹ Charles Venn Pilcher, *The Hereafter in Jewish and Christian Thought With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Resurrection* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), page 160.

In the book of Hebrews Chapter 10, verse 10, we learn Jesus offered his body in sacrifice to his God for the sanctification of those who trust in him. Indeed, the “body” Jesus offered in sacrifice to God was the same body God “prepared” for him (Hebrews 10:5). If God accepted the offering of Jesus’ body, then God has it. Though in one of his post-resurrection appearances Jesus did have wound marks resembling those he received when he was executed at Golgotha, at other times (discussed above) he did not manifest these same wound marks, or the same body, or even speak with the same voice. Jesus presented his original wounds to Thomas to prove that the one whom others had seen was in fact Jesus of Nazareth (John 20:19-27¹²). If he had simply continued to use other forms unlike the one in which he lived and died, then Thomas may have continued doubting and that was not the intent behind Jesus’ manifestation to him.

On another occasion (Luke 24:30) two of Jesus’ disciples stopped to have a meal with him, but his true identity was unknown to them at the time. The account mentions that the two disciples saw Jesus break the bread and hand it to them. Only when Jesus performed the act of breaking the bread did they recognize him, perhaps because of the familiar manner in which he had broken and distributed bread previously.—Compare Matthew 14:19; 15:36; Luke 22:19.

Yet, in this account the disciples must have seen Jesus’ hands (that is, if they saw him break the bread), but they do not mention anything about his having wound marks that would identify him as Jesus of Nazareth. This suggests the body Jesus had at this time was again *not* the same body in which he died.

Jesus’ spiritual body. There are good reasons for believing that while Jesus can materialize any physical form he chooses, he does not have one particular human form in which he at all times exists. In fact, the Bible teaches that the body which Jesus has in heaven is nothing at all like the body he had while he was on the earth. Consider the following description of the risen Jesus by his beloved apostle, John:

¹² Note that in verse 19, though the doors were locked, Jesus appeared suddenly in the room. This suggests he first entered the room as a spirit, and then he took on a human form and appeared in *that* form to those present in the room.

Revelation 1:12-16

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me, and, having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands someone like a son of man, clothed with a garment that reached down to the feet, and girded at the breasts with a golden girdle. Moreover, his head and his hair were white as white wool, as snow, and his eyes as a fiery flame; and his feet were like fine copper when glowing in a furnace; and his voice was as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth a sharp, long two-edged sword was protruding, and his countenance was as the sun when it shines in its power.

Here we have a clear description of what Jesus' heavenly body looks like to humans. Jesus' "head" and his "hair" are said to be "white as wool, as snow, and his eyes as a fiery flame." His feet are "like fine copper when glowing in a furnace" and "his voice was the sound of many waters." Finally, his "countenance was as the sun when it shines in its power." This is a far cry from the human forms Jesus took on after his resurrection!

Revelation 2:18 also describes the heavenly Jesus in similar terms, where it says he has "eyes like a fiery flame, and his feet are like fine copper." These descriptions are also very similar to the angel in Revelation 10:1, whose "face was as the sun, and his feet were as fiery pillars." It is little wonder, then, that the apostle Paul refers to Jesus as 'not a man' in Galatians 1:12.

The descriptions of Jesus' heavenly body in Revelation 1 and 2 also have several striking similarities with other spirit beings described elsewhere in the Bible. For example, in Ezekiel 1:7, 13 the cherubs are described as "gleaming as with the glow of burnished copper," and "like burning coals of fire." Even their sound is similar to Jesus' voice, in that they both sound like "vast waters, like the sound of the Almighty" (Ezekiel 1:24). In Ezekiel 40:3 an angel is described as "like the appearance of copper." In Daniel 10:6 the eyes, the body, and the voice of the angel who appeared to Daniel is described in terms similar to how Jesus and the cherubs in Ezekiel are described:

And his body was like chrys’o-lite, and his face like the appearance of lightning, and his eyes like fiery torches, and his arms and the place of his feet were like the sight of burnished copper, and the sound of his words was like the sound of a crowd [NWT, underlining added].

There are good reasons for believing when Paul writes that Jesus “became a life-giving spirit,” he meant Jesus has the same type of body other spirits are said to have, namely, a heavenly body “not made with hands” (1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 5:1). This type of body is unknown to humans, other than by the descriptions given by those who saw what they wrote about. None of these descriptions, not even of the heavenly Jesus, involve real flesh, blood, or bone. Indeed, after Jesus appeared to Saul from heaven (Acts 9:1-16), Saul (now Paul) referred back to this occasion and stated truthfully (with underlining added): “Paul, an apostle, neither from men nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him up from the dead.”—Galatians 1:1.

During the biblical periods there are other, similar descriptions for spirit beings in ancient Jewish literature associated with the Bible. For example, in the Apocalypse of Abraham (late first to early second centuries CE) the appearance of the body of the angel Yahoel is said to be “like chrysolite,” and the “hair of his head like snow” (11:1-3). In the late first century BCE to early first century CE work Joseph and Aseneth, an angelic figure believed to be Michael is described as having a face “like lightning,” eyes “like sunlight,” hair “like a flame of fire,” and hands and feet “like iron from the fire” (14:9). In the Apocalypse of Zephaniah 6:11-15 (dated to between the first century BCE and the second century CE), Zephaniah is said to have seen “a great angel” whose face shines “like the rays of the sun in its glory” and whose feet are “like bronze which is melted in a fire.”¹³

My point in citing these non-biblical references is to show that the descriptions given for spirit beings are consistent with the

¹³ These and other texts are presented and discussed in greater detail by Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the angels: Angelology and the christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pages 53-61.

biblical description of the same type of heavenly beings, one of whom is the risen Jesus. Based on what we read in the Bible, Jesus does not have his human body in heaven, but he can take on any human form he chooses when he comes to the earth, even the one in which he died if he chooses to do so (John 20:27). But Jesus no longer has the body in which he died. Descriptions of his resurrection body in the Bible prove this, as do other texts which make a clear distinction between living in the flesh and being raised to life as a spirit. Such biblical texts, along with the meaning of the NT word for “body,” will be the basis for the discussion in the next section.

“A Life-Giving Spirit”

Does soma always denote materiality? In his book, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, Robert H. Gundry argues that the Greek word *soma* (often translated as “body”) has a purely physical meaning. In Gundry’s view, the use of *soma* in texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:44 “in and of itself implies materiality.”¹⁴ What, though, are we to make of the adjective πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*, “spiritual”)? If the use of *soma* “implies materiality,” how is a *soma* “spiritual”? Gundry takes “spiritual” to mean “a physical body renovated by the Spirit of Christ and therefore suited to heavenly immortality.”¹⁵ But could it be that “spiritual” in 1 Corinthians 15:44 instead has to do with the *kind of body* under discussion, that is, with the “sort of body” the resurrected ones are “coming”?

Gundry’s view is based in large part on the assumption that *soma* always denotes materiality. While in the Bible (both in the Greek OT and NT) it is true that *soma* often refers to a physical body, this is because the majority of persons referenced in the Bible are physical, human persons! J.A. Ziesler has shown, in contradiction to Gundry’s view, that while *soma* often does have a purely physical reference it also has a more-than-physical

¹⁴ Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, repr. 1987), page 166.

¹⁵ Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, pages 165-166.

meaning in several LXX texts. Ziesler maintains that Gundry’s thesis “cannot be accepted as it stands.”¹⁶

Because of this, Ziesler believes we “cannot rule out the possibility of [a more-than-physical meaning] in Paul also.”¹⁷ There is, in fact, no basis upon which to conclude that “body” always denotes a material body. Indeed, it is clear from Paul’s discussion of the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 that there are *many* different kinds of ‘bodies.’

“With what sort of body?” One of the two questions Paul answers in 1 Corinthians 15 is (according to verse 35), “with what sort of body are they [the dead] coming?” Therefore, the resurrection body may be of more than one *kind*, or “sort” (Greek: ποίω, *poio*). That is why in answering the question Paul writes that there are different kinds of fleshly bodies (verse 39), and even the planetary bodies of the heavens differ in terms of their radiance and glory (verses 40-41).

Also, the bodies in which we were born are said to be different from the bodies in which those resurrected would live. But the language Paul uses to differentiate these two kinds of bodies is such that the second one cannot have *any* remnants of physicality, and in 1 Corinthians 15:47-49 he argues that these ‘bodies’ differ in terms of their composition:

The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven [RSV].

Gundry, however, believes “the term *choikos*, ‘earthy, dusty’, here stresses mortality due to earthy origin (*ek ges*, [‘from the earth’]) rather than substance as such, for its counterpart *epouranios* (‘heavenly’) has nothing to do with substance and is

¹⁶ J.A Ziesler, “ΣΩΜΑ in the Septuagint,” *NovT* 27 (1983), pages 133-145.

¹⁷ Ziesler, “ΣΩΜΑ in the Septuagint,” page 145. On page 145 of his article, note 31, Ziesler suggests that Gundry’s view cannot be sustained in Rom 6:6, 7:24, 8:10, 13, 23, 1Co 6:16, 2Co 10:10, and that in Php 3:21, Rom 12:1, and in 1Co 15:44 his view is “highly improbable.”

defined by the phrase *ex ouranou* ('from heaven'; vv. 47-49)."¹⁸ But the expressions "out of the earth" and "earthy, dusty," *do* speak of the composition of the body! So do the expressions "out of heaven" and "heavenly"! The fact that they modify *anthropos* ("man") is because Paul is using examples of two men known to history to help define by example (in verses 44-45) what is a "physical body" (Adam's "out of the earth" body) and what is a "spiritual body" (the body Jesus was raised to life in as a "spirit"), which body is "out of heaven."

Does the Bible tell us anything more about what it means for a body to be "heavenly," or "out of heaven"? Paul uses similar language to describe the resurrection body in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 5:2 Paul uses the same characterization he uses in 1 Corinthians 15:47, namely, *ex ouranou* (English: "out of heaven"). But he goes even further, speaking of this body as one "not made with hands," just as Jesus is said to have described his resurrection body in Mark 14:58. Paul elsewhere defines "not made with hands" as "not of this creation."—Hebrews 9:11.

As I also noted earlier in this chapter, Paul speaks of the physical body as one that is "dissolved," in contrast to the "building from God" which is spoken of as "everlasting in the heavens." These descriptions and differences directly relate to the composition of the bodies under discussion. From this it is clear that the physical body is dissolved and replaced by God with a body that is "in the heavens." So there is no sense in which the fundamental composition of our present physical bodies (which are "of this creation") and the resurrection body that is "not made with hands" are the same. They are clearly different.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom." Additional evidence that the spiritual body spoken of by Paul and described in other parts of the Bible does not have any remnants of human physicality is found in 1 Corinthians 15:50. Here Paul further defines the resurrection body in terms of its composition by speaking of that which the spiritual body is *not*. Paul writes, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom, neither does

¹⁸ Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, page 166.

corruption inherit incorruption.” While this reference to “flesh and blood” seems to be clearly a reference to humanity’s physical composition, Gundry believes this description “does not imply immateriality of the resurrected body.” Rather, Gundry believes that “the phrase ‘flesh and blood’ connotes the present body’s weakness and perishability.”¹⁹ But Gundry has no good reasons for his conclusion.

In addition to 1 Corinthians 15:50, the expression “flesh and blood” is used four other times in the NT (Matthew 16:17; Galatians 1:16; Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 2:14). In each of these other four instances, the expression refers simply to human beings. Indeed, three of the five times it is used in the NT it is in contrast to spirit beings (Matthew 16:17; 1 Corinthians 15:50; Ephesians 6:12)! Any reference to a human being’s physicality also implies the “weakness and perishability” that belongs to our bodies.

But the expression “flesh and blood” itself is used simply as a reference to human beings, with human bodies. Therefore, the “flesh and blood” physical (human) body is “from the earth,” and it is in direct contrast with the spiritual body “out of heaven,” which is “not made with hands.” When the first tent is dissolved it “returns to the dust” (Genesis 3:19; Job 34:15; Psalm 90:3; Ecclesiastes 3:20), while the second body is “everlasting in the heavens.”—2 Corinthians 5:1.

“Made alive in the spirit.” There is still more evidence from the NT to show that the earliest Christian teaching concerning Jesus’ resurrection was that he was raised as “a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45). This complements well the teaching found in 1 Timothy 3:16, where Paul also wrote, “He [Jesus] was manifested in the body [Greek: *sarx*, ‘flesh’], vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels; who was proclaimed among the nations, believed in throughout the world, glorified in high heaven” (NEB, underlining added). The apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:18 also made a contrast between Jesus’ physical life on earth and his resurrection in the spirit, “Why, even Christ died once for all time concerning sins, a righteous person for unrighteous ones, that he might lead

¹⁹ Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology*, page 166.

YOU to God, he being put to death in the flesh, but being made alive in the spirit.”—NWT, underlining added.

Other Bible translations render the underlined portion of the last sentence in the above paragraph as “made alive by the Spirit” (NIV, underlining added). But the two clauses “in the flesh” and “in the spirit” are antithetical to one another. The words “flesh” and “spirit” are likely datives indicating the mode of existence in which Jesus died (“flesh”) and the existence into which he was “made alive” (“spirit”). The sense for both cannot be “by the flesh” and “by the spirit,” respectively, “because the instrumental idea does not fit σαρκί [Greek: *sarki*, ‘flesh’]; Christ was put to death ‘in the flesh,’ but hardly ‘by the flesh.’”²⁰

Disagreeing with Michaels is Greek grammarian Daniel Wallace. Wallace writes that “if 1 Pet 3:18 is a hymnic or liturgical fragment, this can be no objection because of ‘poetic license’: Poetry is replete with examples of grammatical and lexical license, not the least of which is the use of the same morpho-syntactic [grammatical] categories, in parallel lines, with different senses.”²¹ This is certainly a possibility, but whether or not this is a hymn of some kind²² it seems more natural “in such a closely welded phrase” to look for the same use of the dative in both cases.²³ In so doing, it can be argued based on good reasons that Peter makes a contrast “between [Jesus’] earthly existence and his risen state.”²⁴

²⁰ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1988), page 204. While I do not believe Michaels shares Jehovah's Witnesses' view of this text, he does argue cogently for what I believe is a proper translation. Michaels' statement in reference to 1Co 15:45, to the effect that “a ‘life-giving spirit’ ... no more implies immateriality than does the preceding description of the first Adam as ‘a living soul,’” is not well-reasoned. In 1Co 15:43-44 Paul sets up the following contrast between the physical body and the spiritual body: the first one is “sown in weakness” (that is, it is made “flesh”) and the second one is “raised up in power.” In verse 45 Paul then gives examples of the bodies he is describing, namely, the physical body of Adam and the spiritual body of Jesus. Adam was composed of flesh and blood. Jesus was made a “life-giving spirit.”

²¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), page 343, note 76.

²² See William Joseph Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6*, 2d. ed. (Analecta Biblica 23; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), pages 109-120, for a discussion of the literary structure of 1Pe 3:18-4:6.

²³ Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits*, page 141.

²⁴ Michaels, *1 Peter*, page 204.

1 Peter 3:18 is similar in its grammar to 1 Peter 4:6. The latter reads, “For the Gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God” (NASB, underlining added). While on the earth Jesus was “flesh.” At his resurrection he was “made alive in the spirit.” But who raised Jesus up from the dead? Some believe Jesus raised himself from the dead. Others believe that God the Father resurrected him. In the final section of this chapter, I will consider what the Bible teaches and show how it is consistent with the beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“I will raise it up.” When Jesus spoke these words in John 2:19, did he mean he would *raise himself* from the dead? If so, the NT writers (Jesus’ early followers) must not have understood him correctly, because in the NT it is the Father, not the Son, who elsewhere is always credited for having raised Jesus up from the dead.²⁵ According to the Bible, Jesus is now “living forever and ever” and he has the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). When Jesus said “I will raise it up” in John 2:19 (in reference to the “temple” that is his “body”), the expression can be understood consistently with what we read in the Bible about the cause of Jesus’ resurrection. Commenting on what Jesus said in John 2:19, H.A.W. Meyer writes:

But the objection disappears if we simply give due weight to the figurative nature of the expression, which rests upon that visible contemplation of the resurrection, according to which the *Subject* that arises, whose resurrection is described as the re-erecting of the destroyed temple, must also be the Subject that erects the temple,—without affecting the further doctrine, which, moreover, does not come under consideration, that the *causa efficiens*, i.e. *the actual revivifying power, is the Father*. Christ receiving His life again from the Father ([John] x. 17) and rising again, Himself raises up by His very resurrection the destroyed temple.²⁶

²⁵ See Acts 2:24; 3:15; Rom 4:24; 6:4; 8:11; 1Co 6:14; 2Co 4:14; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:17, 19-20; Col 2:12; 1Th 1:10; 1Pe 1:21.

²⁶ H.A.W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of John*, trans. William Urwick (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), page 114 (emphasis added).

Meyer refers to John 10:17, which in the NWT reads (along with verse 18): “This is why the Father loves me, because I surrender my soul, in order that I may *receive* it again. No man has taken it away from me, but I surrender it of my own initiative. I have authority to surrender it, and I have authority to *receive* it again. The commandment on this I received from my Father” (emphasis added). Here Jesus says that he would “receive” his life “again” (Greek: *palin*), which shows that he must have received it at least once before from the Father.—Compare Galatians 1:1.

Therefore, when we read John 2:19 and Jesus' words, “I will raise it up,” it really depends on whether we interpret John 2:19 in light of John 10:17-18, or vice versa. Since John 2:19 uses figurative language in other ways (such as using “temple” for “body”), it is possible that Jesus' words in John 2:19 are to be interpreted as Jesus receiving something from someone else but in such a way that he (Jesus) is in some sense responsible for his own resurrection. Indeed, in many Bible translations the Greek word (λαμβάνω, *lambano*) is translated as “take,” while NWT and other Bibles use “receive” or something similar. If we accept “take” rather than “receive” for *lambano* in John 10:17-18, then this is what Jesus taught:

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father [NIV, underlining added].

Not one of the translations where I found *lambano* translated “take” in the first two instances of John 10:17-18, consistently translated the third instance of *lambano* in these two texts also as “take.”²⁷ The translation of the third instance of *lambano* is always with the sense of “receive.” Jesus “received” the “commandment” from God; he did not “take” the commandment from his Father!

²⁷ For example, the NIV, NASB, NAB, KJV, and Goodspeed's translation all render *lambano* as “take” in the first two occurrences of Joh 10:17-18, but they translate the third occurrence in the last sentence of Joh 10:18 as “received.” On the other hand, the NEB, NWT, Rotherham, Weymouth, and others consistently render *lambano* in the sense of ‘receive’ in all three instances.

The third instance of *lambano* therefore provides support for understanding the first two instances similarly, namely, in the sense of ‘receive.’ Regardless of how the first two instances of *lambano* are understood, the third instance supports the teaching that, ultimately, the Father is the one who decides what can or will be allowed to happen, as I will explain in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

The Bible teaches that spirits, including angels and the heavenly Jesus, have bodies that are like “copper,” with ‘eyes of fire’ (Ezekiel 40:3; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 1:12-16; 2:18). The Bible also explicitly states that Jesus was raised as a “life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45) and that he took on different physical forms when he appeared to his followers, and this included the same form (at least in terms of the wound marks on his hands and on his feet) in which he died (John 20:26-29). However, Jesus is never described in human terms when he appears in his heavenly glory. Indeed, he is described by Paul as not a “man,” which is why what he received (the good news) is also described as “not something human” (Galatians 1:11-12). Jehovah’s Witnesses accept these biblical teachings.

The belief that Jesus today has a body of ‘flesh and bone,’ is not supported by any biblical evidence. There is plenty of evidence to show that Jesus was believed to have appeared in a variety of human forms, *real* human forms, real enough to eat with (Luke 24:36-43). But manifesting different forms while on the earth does not necessarily mean those same forms Jesus took reflect the actual ‘body’ he has in heaven today.

Indeed, the evidence shows spirit beings like the resurrected Jesus are nothing at all like humans in terms of their heavenly bodies’ composition and glory. Jesus and those resurrected after his image have a body “not made with hands” that is “from God,” which is “everlasting in the heavens.” This is in contrast with our present “earthly body,” which like Adam’s body is made of “dust.”—Genesis 2:7; 2 Corinthians 5:1; 1 John 3:2.

At some point, the present human body will be dissolved and if Jah wills it then it will be replaced with a body that bears “the image of the heavenly one” (1 Corinthians 15:49). Jesus was given the authority to “receive” or to “take” back his life, and now he has the authority to raise up from the dead all whom he chooses, which choice Jesus bases on how those who died lived and trusted or believed in him and in his Father.—John 5:25-30; Revelation 2:23.

But how can we direct our own lives in ways that show our desire to serve Jah in spite of our sinful nature? How do our actions, or the actions of anyone, relate to the will of God? In the next chapter I will discuss these and other related questions as I consider the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Witnesses of Jah, and others concerning what we have reasons to believe about Jah's knowledge, Jah's freedom, and his sovereignty.

7

The Freedom of Jah and the Free Will of Mankind

“Pilate said to him ... ‘Do you not know I have authority to release you and I have authority to impale you?’ Jesus answered him: ‘You would have no authority at all against me unless it had been granted to you from above’” (John 19:10-11, NWT). In his response to Pilate’s claim to have authority over him, Jesus did not dispute what Pilate claimed. Pilate’s use of “authority” clearly has to do with a decision or choice about whether to release Jesus or to give the order to have him executed. Jesus did point out that while Pilate may be in a position to make such a choice, he is only able to do so because God, “from above,” gives him the “authority” to determine such things.

In teaching Pilate this truth, Jesus showed very plainly that no matter what choice Pilate is allowed to make, it is Jah’s sovereign will which permits him to make any decisions in the first place. This can be used to show Jah’s freedom, in which he is able to bring about his will apart from anyone, or by means of those to whom he gives authority (as with Pilate). In both cases the decisions are Jah’s, for he either decides matters directly or he chooses to let others determine one or more possible outcomes.

These possible outcomes are, therefore, limited to the choices Jah created for us to make, or which he allows us to make (Genesis 3:11; 4:7; Deuteronomy 30:17-20). If, however, those to whom Jah grants authority choose to decide matters in ways contrary to or even in defiance of Jah’s will, then God will judge us in accordance with our works (Revelation 22:12). That is why Jesus told Pilate, “The man that handed me over to you has greater sin.”—John 19:11.

In this chapter¹ I will present the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses who are associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society respecting the sovereignty of God and the "free will" of man. As a Christian Witness of Jah, as one of Jehovah's Witnesses who tries to avoid 'commands of men as doctrine' and follow only what can be shown to be true for good reasons (Isaiah 29:13; Mark 7:7), I will present the biblical reasons for our beliefs about Jah's sovereignty and mankind's "free will."

By "free will" I mean simply that men and women have the ability and the God-given or God-permitted opportunity to make choices. We can and often do decide certain matters on our own. Examples include our choices of what clothing we wear, how we educate ourselves, or whether we believe in and follow the teachings of a G-god, G-gods, or someone or something else.

There are many good reasons for accepting the Bible as a reliable historical guide, accurate in its presentation of the affairs of men, women, and for many nations of the earth. In terms of its presentation of the God Jah, the Bible teaches that humans have a measure of freedom to make choices within a limited sphere of existence, about a limited number of things, in a limited number of ways. Jah God created "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Then within this sphere of existence (the earth) the Bible teaches that Jah made all sorts of livings things, with one creation above them all, namely, man and woman who were made in God's "image" and "likeness."—Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:4-8.

As I intend to show from the Bible, at any time Jah can involve himself in the affairs of any of his creatures, particularly

¹ Much of the content of this chapter is based on some of my earlier writings on these subjects, most of which can be read online at Elihu Books through the main menu links for *IN MEDIO* and "*Upon the Lampstand*." These include: "Public Debates, the Extent of God's Knowledge, and Human Will," *IN MEDIO* 1.4 (October 2006 [rev. October 17, 2009]), pages 1-14; "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man, Part One: Isaiah," *IN MEDIO* 1.5 (November 2006 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-19; "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man, Part Two: Romans," *IN MEDIO* 1.6 (December 2006 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-17; "The Knowledge of God and the Will of Man, Part Three: 'The Scroll of Life ... from the Founding of the World,'" *IN MEDIO* 2.1 (January 2007 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-21; "OASIS," *IN MEDIO* 2.2 (February 2007 [rev. April 19, 2008]), pages 1-19; "Does God 'know all things' that will occur, before they actually happen?" "*Upon the Lampstand*" (February 7, 2007 [rev. May 4, 2008]), pages 1-5.

if the freedom he gives us is not used according to this will. This can be seen in the Genesis account involving Adam, Eve, Satan, and God (Genesis 3:1-19). Here God *allowed* Satan to mislead Eve. He *allowed* Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. God *allowed* Adam to make a choice about whether to eat the fruit, also. Jah also *chose* to change the conditions of the earth, to increase woman's childbearing pain, to change Adam's ability to harvest the land, and Jah *chose* to give a prophecy about the end of the "serpent" (Genesis 3:14-19). In all things, in all such or similar ways, Jah may do according to his will and "there exists no one that can check his hand or that can say to him, 'What have you been doing?'"—Daniel 4:35.

Complicating the choices Jah permits humans to make is sin, or disobedience to God, which has been a part of human nature since Adam and Eve (Romans 5:12). Because we received a sinful nature through Adam and Eve, each of us is at times "a slave of sin" (John 8:34) and so subject to "hurtful desires" which lead to sin (Colossians 3:5; James 1:14). According to the Bible, in spite of our sin we can at times overcome our desires for what is bad, "turn in the opposite direction," and even choose the "way out" (Isaiah 50:5; 1 Corinthians 10:13). We simply cannot do this all of the time, and so we need forgiveness by God as we struggle against our own "flesh" (Romans 7:24-25). The Bible teaches that Jah the Father provided the basis for our forgiveness, namely, faith in Jesus of Nazareth.

In this chapter I will introduce the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding Jah's sovereign will, his freedom to decide matters, to permit others to decide matters, or to allow things to occur in some other way that is itself either decided on or permitted by Jah to occur. I will then address the teachings of Dr. Robert Morey and Dr. James White, two Jehovah's Witness critics and well-known apologists for what is known as "Reformed" theology. "Reformed" theologians and apologists consider their beliefs "Christian" and, thus, based soundly on the Bible. I disagree. I believe the arguments and beliefs associated with Reformed views concerning God, his sovereign will, and the freedom of mankind are more connected with the arguments and beliefs of leaders of the Reformation, most notably, John Calvin

(July 10, 1509—May 27, 1564), than they are based on the teachings of the Bible.

In this chapter I will defend the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses who are associated with the Watchtower Society, where their teachings are in harmony with the Bible. I will also present the beliefs of the Christian Witnesses of Jah as they relate to Jah's knowledge, to his sovereignty, and to his freedom, and also as they relate to the freedom Jah has given mankind. I will also present some of the beliefs of John Calvin and other "Reformed" theologians since him, as I compare them with the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and with the beliefs of the Christian Witnesses of Jah.

The Knowledge and the Freedom of Jah

Jah's knowledge. What does God know? Many of us would no doubt answer that God knows everything. But what exactly does it mean to 'know everything'? According to Jesus, there is at least one thing "only the Father" knows, not even the Son himself, and that is the day when Jesus will come again in judgment of the earth (Matthew 24:36). But what else does the Bible teach us about Jah, about what he knows, and about *when* he knows it?

The biblical answer is that Jah knows what will happen if he chooses to know. Or he may know all possible outcomes (having made them possible in the first place), but at the same time let others make choices which he permits them to make, and so all choices made before him are subject to his sovereign will. Indeed, the Bible teaches us that Jah allows certain things to occur that he in fact *learns* from, for he determined that there would be things others would do that he would come to know as others did them, but not beforehand. In this way, the Bible teaches us that in one sense God can and does know all things that can or will occur, but in another sense he learns about things as they occur before him or as he watches from above.—Psalm 14:2; 53:2.

According to the Bible, God created humans within a sphere of existence (the earth) concerning which God knows and has

determined all of the possible things humans can do. Within the earth there was a garden in Eden, and from that garden Jah God intended for mankind to “be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Jah designed the earth, and he designed and created mankind. He knows what man can and cannot do, and he knows what can be achieved, good and bad, within the earth. Jah set the limits both for what can be done *in* earth, and what can be done *to* it.—Job Chapters 38 and 39.

Jah commanded Adam not to eat the fruit of “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.” But God also knew it was possible for Adam to disobey him and eat from this tree, in spite of being told not to do so. This is proven by the fact that, ultimately, that is exactly what Adam chose, namely, to disobey Jah and to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. God let Adam eat from it, according to Adam’s own desire, even though his desire was in defiance of God’s expressed will.—Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6, 11-12, 17-19; compare James 1:14.

Consider, too, Adam’s naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). God created the animals and he created mankind. Jah knew that at some point within the sphere of his earthly creation that man would name the animals. This is clear from Jah’s calling of the animals to Adam so Adam could name them, which indicates that Jah made us with an awareness of names and with an ability and a desire to give names to others. But did Jah know the names Adam would give to the animals *before* Adam spoke them?

The best available evidence from the biblical record shows us that Jah *chose* or intended to allow Adam to name the animals in the earthly realm, and that Jah was involved personally in the naming process by “bringing them [the animals] to the man,” for Jah wanted “to see what [Adam] would call each one” (Genesis 2:19). This shows anticipation and interest on Jah’s part, interest in his creatures and in what the one made in his image would “call” or name Jah’s other, earthly creations.

Jah first gave Adam a linguistically expressive capacity to utter words as names of various things, including names of animals and the man-like “Woman” (Genesis 2:22-23). But Jah set up the conditions and then *allowed* Adam to determine their names. Though Adam determined the first names of physical

creatures, Jah is the one who created the range of possible names which Adam could speak, and so Jah knew each possible name which Adam might use *before* he spoke them. Yet, Jah allowed Adam to select the name for each creature.

By choosing to wait and “see what [Adam] would call each one” (Genesis 2:19), Jah shows us how he really is as a person, in ways that are no more imperfect or flawed than are true of him because he did not know the true appearance of physical “light,” that is, until he actually created it according to Genesis 1:3-5:

And God proceeded to say: “Let light come to be.” Then there came to be light. After that God saw that the light was good, and God brought about a division between the light and the darkness. And God began calling the light Day, but the darkness he called Night.

Unless Morey, White, and other “Reformed” theologians and apologists are going to claim that the physical “light” created here existed before it was created (!), then God did not ‘see the light’ and thus *know* what it looked like as a truly existing thing until he actually created it. Jah may have looked ahead in some sense to what “light” would be *like*, but until the physical light here created *actually existed*, then according to this account God had not yet ‘seen’ it so as to pronounce the light “good.”—Genesis 1:4.

This is a defensible, biblical teaching concerning the knowledge of God and it shows that he learns as he creates from those things he makes for the first time, which learning Jah *intends* (as in the case of Adam’s naming of the animals). This is consistent with Jah’s freedom to do what he chooses or to permit others to make choices (like Pilate, from the account quoted at the beginning of this chapter) based on the measure of “authority” he gives.

Jah’s freedom. How, though, can Jah be “free” if humans can make their own choices? The obvious and quick answer to this question, at least for me, is that Jah is the one who gave humans the freedom to make choices in the first place. Therefore, it is by Jah’s freedom that we have authority to make any choices at all. Jah is therefore sovereign over all choices, for he knows what is possible and what is not possible for anyone to choose or

to do. Ultimately, the choices we make have consequences for us and possibly for others, but not for Jah. For while Jah loves humans whom he made, the choices he permits us to make cannot undo or keep what he determines to do from being done. We can only make choices, for good or for bad, which is itself a great gift, though one which Jah and Jesus will judge not “by any mere appearance to his eyes, nor reprove simply according to the thing heard,” for they know our true intentions.—Isaiah 11:3; Jeremiah 11:20; Revelation 2:23.

Jah God is “free” to allow others to make choices within environments he has created or that he permits others to establish. As “the only true” and “one God” (John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6), the Father can even change the course of events which he has started or that he intends to set into motion, even so the outcome is radically different from what he initially (for good reasons) desired. Consider the account in Exodus 6:6-8, where Jah says to Moses (all capitals in the NWT are for plural references):

“Therefore say to the sons of Israel, ‘I am Jehovah, and I shall certainly bring YOU out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver YOU from their slavery, and I shall indeed reclaim YOU with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I shall certainly take YOU to me as a people, and I shall indeed prove to be God to YOU; and YOU will certainly know that I am Jehovah YOUR God who is bringing YOU out from under the burdens of Egypt. And I shall certainly bring YOU into the land that I raised my hand in oath to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and I shall indeed give it to YOU as something to possess. I am Jehovah.’”

Yet, after they were delivered from Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, these same people sinned so greatly against Jah that he said to Moses as is recorded in Exodus 32:7-10:

Jehovah now said to Moses: “Go, descend, because your people whom you led up out of the land of Egypt have acted ruinously. They have turned aside in a hurry from the way I have commanded them to go. They have made a molten statue of a calf for themselves and keep bowing down to it and sacrificing to it and saying, ‘This is your God, O Israel, who

led you up out of the land of Egypt.” And Jehovah went on to say to Moses: “I have looked at this people and here it is a stiff-necked people. So now let me be, that my anger may blaze against them and I may exterminate them, and let me make you into a great nation.”

The Israelites and those with them “turned aside” from ‘the way Jah commanded them to go’ and that is what showed Jah that they were ignoring his will. So Jah righteously decreed that he would “exterminate” those who had sinned against him in this account, and then ‘make Moses into a great nation.’ This was a radical change from what Jah had decreed would occur in Exodus 6:6-8, and it shows that Jah’s freedom is such that he can, and does, adjust or change his decrees if he chooses to do so in accordance with his sovereign freedom.

In the case of the nation of Israel in regards to the Exodus accounts cited above, Jah’s freedom to promise deliverance to them (Exodus 6:6-8), then his freedom to change his mind and decree that they should be ‘exterminated’ (Exodus 32:7-10), and then ultimately Jah’s freedom in allowing the Israelites to live are all clearly expressed. According to the Bible, Jah even felt “regret over the evil that he had spoken.” Though the “evil” in this case was entirely justified under the circumstances, Jah still felt “regret” as the account in Exodus 32:11-14 makes plain:

And Moses proceeded to soften the face of Jehovah his God and to say: “Why, O Jehovah, should your anger blaze against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent he brought them out in order to kill them among the mountains and to exterminate them from the surface of the ground’? Turn from your burning anger and feel regret over the evil against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel your servants, to whom you swore by yourself, in that you said to them, ‘I shall multiply YOUR seed like the stars of the heavens, and all this land that I have designated I shall give to YOUR seed, that they may indeed take possession of it to time indefinite.’” And Jehovah began to feel regret over the evil that he had spoken of doing to his people.

The above account tells us a great deal about Jah's personality and about his love for others. Jah was merciful and just in deciding to change his decree, to consider and even accept the words of Moses who spoke out of love and concern for Jah's reputation, and for the sake of the Israelites at Sinai. Had Jah followed through with his initial decree to "exterminate" the Israelites who sinned against him, and to then raise up another people through Moses, then Jah's decree that a nation of people through which the promised "seed" would come is still true (Genesis 3:15; 22:18). But the individuals who would make up this nation could change, as we can see clearly from Jah's decrees in the above biblical accounts.

"Reformed" Theology and the Bible

God's "Reformed" foreknowledge. Reformed theologians from John Calvin to Robert Morey use the Bible in support of their view of God's knowledge and sovereignty. I do not believe it supports their teachings on these subjects. For good reasons which I will present in this chapter, I believe Reformed theology dishonors Jah in at least two ways: 1) It misrepresents the teachings of his written Word and 2) it misrepresents Jah himself.

On September 27, 2006, I was a guest on "The Narrow Mind" show with its host, Pastor Gene Cook. Dr. Morey was also on the program with Pastor Cook, and the discussion turned from the deity of Jesus to the subject of what God can or does know according to Morey's "Reformed" view and against my own view as one Jehovah's Witnesses.² In presenting the Reformed view of God's foreknowledge and sovereignty (specifically, Calvin's view), historian Philip Schaff writes:

Predestination, according to Calvin, is the eternal and unchangeable decree of God by which he foreordained, for his own glory and the display of his attributes of mercy and

² The audio for this show is available under the Elihu Books Topical Index, under "A, Audio: Debate: September 27, 2006, The Narrow Mind (Morey/Stafford)," and in several other sections of the Elihu Index.

justice, a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation. "Predestination," he [John Calvin] says, "we call the eternal decree of God, by which he has determined in himself the destiny of every man. For they are not all created in the same condition, but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say, he is predestined either to life or to death."³

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that by "decree" God "has determined in himself the destiny of every man," or that God "foreordained ... eternal damnation" for anyone. We believe the Bible teaches that God puts "life and death" before us and that he wants all of us to "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Of course, anyone can *say* his or her beliefs are based on the Bible, even as Reformed believers consider their teachings biblical. The only way to find out is to do as the earliest Christians did, and as I have endeavored to do so far in this book, namely, to cite and to discuss the evidence to see what are the best available reasons, and which beliefs they support.—Acts 17:3.

Therefore, consider the following excerpt from my September 27, 2006, radio discussion with Dr. Morey, which took place starting at minute 24:34 of the show. I will number the exchange in order to make clearer the sequence of information as it was given. This will also make referencing each part of the transcript easier in the discussion which follows it:

[1]Morey: Did God in fact know ahead of time, let's say, that Judas would choose to betray Christ and does Scripture indicate that God's foreknowledge was complete and he knew everything everybody would do concerning the crucifixion?

[2]Stafford: He knew that it would happen but "woe to the one through whom it comes."

[3]Morey: So in other words ...

³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [1910]), pages 549-550.

[4]**Stafford:** That's Jesus' words.

[5]**Morey:** ...even though Judas' betrayal was fully understood from all eternity, so Luke 22:22 "it had been determined."

[6]**Stafford:** Well, I wouldn't say that.

[7]**Morey:** Well, Luke 22:22, "he went to betray Christ as it had been determined." At the same time...

[8]**Stafford:** But that doesn't say "determined from all eternity."

[9]**Morey:** Well that...yes...yes it does. Because as you take a word study of that word and you go over to Acts 2 and Acts 4, you find that the crucifixion of Christ was foreordained from the foundation of the world.

[10]**Stafford:** Well, that's not "eternity," that's the "foundation of the world."

[11]**Morey:** "*Before* the foundation of the world." From all eternity.

[12]**Stafford:** Yes, "*Before*" Adam and Eve had children, "before the throwing down of seed" God determined after Adam rebelled that there would be...that the serpent would bruise Jesus in the heel and that, thus, foretold his betrayal at the hands of one who eventually was named "Judas."

It is clear from the above that Dr. Morey believes that Luke 22:22, Acts 2, and Acts 4 teach that "Judas' betrayal was fully understood from all eternity." Therefore, I will here consider each of these texts and accounts (as translated in the NWT) to determine whether any of them teach what Morey claims:

Luke 22:22 (with verse 21):

But, look! the hand of my betrayer is with me at the table. Because the Son of man is going his way according to what is marked out; all the same, woe to that man through whom he is betrayed! [Underlining added.]

The Greek for "marked out" in the above text is *horismenon*, which is a form of the Greek verb *horizo* meaning to "*determine*,

appoint, fix, set.”⁴ It is in this same sense I understand NWT’s “marked out” and also why I believe the betrayal of Jesus was “determined” or “marked out” before it happened. Yet, as I told Morey ([8]Stafford), Luke 22:22 “doesn’t say ‘determined from all eternity.’” Note again Morey’s reply, “... yes it does” ([9]Morey). Morey referred to Acts 2 and to Acts 4 as good reasons for his interpreting Luke 22:22 as if “the crucifixion of Christ was foreordained from the foundation of the world.” However, note once more that for Morey “from the foundation of the world” *means* “from all eternity” ([5]Morey).

The only verses in Acts 2 which speak to this issue in any way similar to Morey’s claims are Acts 2:22, 23. The only verses in Acts 4 which in any way relate to what Morey spoke about are Acts 4:24-28. Consider them in their order of occurrence:

Acts 2:22-23

[Peter said,] “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus the Naz·a·rene’, a man publicly shown by God to YOU through powerful works and portents and signs that God did through him in YOUR midst, just as YOU yourselves know, this [man], as one delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, YOU fastened to a stake by the hand of lawless men and did away with. [Underlining added.]

The Greek for “the determined counsel and foreknowledge” is *tei horismenei boulei kai prognosei*. Peter does not immediately associate his assertion with an OT text, as he does with the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:24-28). Later he associates what was “announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets” with the acts of the Jewish people and their rulers when they ‘disowned’ and ‘killed’ the Christ (Acts 3:13-18). It seems clear, then, that “the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God” concerning the suffering and killing of the Christ was “announced beforehand” by God, but *not* “from all eternity.”

⁴ A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 515.

Morey's understanding appears to be connected with his view of "before/from the foundation of the world," which I will consider further in the next section. But Morey's view, namely, that being handed over for death by his own people means Jesus' death was "fully understood from all eternity," is not supported by Acts 2:22-23. This leaves us with Morey's final reference:

Acts 4:24-28

Upon hearing this they with one accord raised their voices to God and said: "Sovereign Lord, you are the One who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them, and who through holy spirit said by the mouth of our forefather David, your servant, 'Why did nations become tumultuous and peoples meditate upon empty things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers massed together as one against Jehovah and against his anointed one.' Even so, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with [men of] nations and with peoples of Israel were in actuality gathered together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, in order to do what things your hand and counsel had foreordained to occur. [Underlining added.]

Again we read that God's "counsel had foreordained [Greek: form of *pro'orizo*]" the things which were to occur against his "servant," his Son. Specifically, in this context the things which were "to occur" involved the actions of Herod and Pilate (Mark 3:6; 8:15; 12:13; Luke 13:31; 23:8-12; John 19:16). These "things" were prophesied about, not "from all eternity," but in Psalm 2:1-2. All of these prophecies concerning the suffering of the Christ relate back to what was prophesied by Jah about the 'bruising of the heel' of the promised "seed," the Messiah (Genesis 3:15), not to an "eternal" plan of God's in place before the events recorded in Genesis Chapter 3.

Morey has misread all three of the above referenced Bible accounts. A correct reading and interpretation of these accounts, according to their grammar and their historical context, does not support the Reformed understanding of the time from which Jesus' betrayal was foreknown (namely, "from all eternity"). As it is presented to us in the Bible, had Adam and Eve not sinned by

disobeying Jah there would have been no need for this “counsel” regarding the death of the Messiah to have been “foreordained to occur.” That is why God foretold what would occur in connection with the promised seed after Adam sinned. It is Jah’s freedom to act as the “one” and “only true God.”—John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6.

The Potter’s “Reformed” freedom. The Bible teaches that the biblical God Jah decreed the personally expressive, decision-making capacities of spirits and of humans made in his image (Genesis 1:26). Jah is the one who created the spheres of existence in which we live, namely, “the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 10:6). In these areas of existence beings made in God’s image (like Pilate) can make choices within the authority each of us has “from above” (John 19:11). Therefore, each and every single decision which can be made is one that has already been decreed as possible by Jah, though this does not mean that Jah is the one who otherwise ‘predestines’ the choices that are actually made by those to whom he gives such authority.

As a Reformed theologian, Dr. White has a different view of God’s freedom and of his sovereign decrees. In the next subsection under “OASIS,” I will present and evaluate White’s use of the traditional acronym “TULIP,” which represents five points of White’s Reformed beliefs about God’s “doctrines of grace.”⁵ White also adds a “sixth point” to TULIP, namely, the “freedom of God.”⁶ For White, these ‘six points’ of belief together with White’s view of God’s Creatorship result “in the doctrine of God’s decrees.”⁷ White further describes this as “the soul-comforting truth that God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe.”⁸

White isolates “three scriptural witnesses” in order to “testify to this truth.”⁹ I will consider each of White’s three “witnesses”

⁵ James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler’s Chosen But Free* (Merrick, NY: Calvary Press, 2000), page 38.

⁶ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 41.

⁷ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 45.

⁸ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 45 (underlining added).

⁹ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 45.

to try and determine if they support his views. Like White, I will here use the New American Standard Bible (1995) in presenting the three accounts cited by White:

1) Isaiah 10:5-7; Isaiah 10:12-17 (following comment):

Isaiah 10:5-7: Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
 And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,
 I send it against a godless nation
 And commission it against the people of My fury
 To capture booty and to seize plunder,
 And to trample them down like mud in the streets.
 Yet it does not so intend,
 Nor does it plan so in its heart,
 But rather it is its purpose to destroy
 And to cut off many nations.

According to Dr. White, this is “one of the most striking evidences of God’s sovereign control over the affairs of men.”¹⁰ In one sense, I could not agree more. But White’s overall assessment is unsupported by this account. Dr. White is correct in noting that God is “sending Assyria.” That is, in fact, what the account says explicitly (“I send it” [verse 6]).¹¹ The account also shows us that Jah is actively causing something to occur that does not appear would have happened had he not become involved at this particular time. But White misses completely the true nature of Assyria’s use by God when he writes:

God is clear: the woe He is announcing is on the very instrument He is using to punish Israel! Assyria is not a willing party to the punishment of Israel: they do not intend to be involved in doing God’s work, “but rather it is its purpose to destroy and to cut off many nations [Isaiah 10:7].” Assyria had one purpose, God another, and all in the same historical events. While God says He is using Assyria, He likewise says He will punish them for their *intentions*.¹²

¹⁰ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 46.

¹¹ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 46.

¹² White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 46.

It is very important to note White's qualification of Assyria's 'will' and 'intentions' by his writing that they are not "involved in doing God's work." This is White's way of preserving the basis for God's judgment against the very ones whom he sends to accomplish his will, but it falls short of capturing what Jah is doing according to this account. When Jah involves himself with others in this way and causes them to do his will, Jah is the one who will govern to what extent a person or a nation will be a part of his purpose. The actual reasons or intentions that the people or nations accepted as a basis for acting are not from Jah and, thus, the intentions or desires they have or act upon are punishable by him.

The first part of White's first 'witness' to his belief about God's decrees shows God can direct people to do his will, even if they are not at first inclined to do so. Jah will cause them to do his will by making them think they are following their own desire, in this case, by means of Assyria's "purpose to destroy ... and to cut off many nations" (Isaiah 10:7). In this way Jah uses the Assyrian's disposition to incite their nation against Jerusalem. There are *two* wills here, *two* intentions (Jah's and Assyria's), with God causing his will to be done by means of Assyria's desire which is also, at the same time, punishable by him because their desire is sinful regardless of what it ends up accomplishing according to Jah's freedom.

While Assyria may not have been a "willing party" in terms of doing what it did for the purpose of being "involved in doing God's work," Assyria was most certainly a "willing party" in that it had the desire to "destroy and to cut off many nations." Jah simply used Assyria's desire and intentions to bring about his will for Jerusalem. Jah did not *cause* Assyria to be arrogant, nor did Jah give Assyria the desire to "cut off many nations," that is, other than Israel. Jah used what was already "in his [the Assyrian's] heart" (Isaiah 10:7), for Jah knew of the Assyrians' attitude toward other nations (Isaiah 10:8-10) and also that he would feel the same way toward Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:11). In this way, Jah turned the Assyrian's heart toward Jerusalem.—Compare 1 Chronicles 29:18; Proverbs 21:1.

The rest of White's first 'witness' (Isaiah 10:12-17) also does not support his claims. Consider:

Isaiah 10:12-17: So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness." For he has said,

"By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did *this*,

For I have understanding;

And I removed the boundaries of the peoples

And plundered their treasures,

And like a mighty man I brought down *their* inhabitants,

And my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest,

And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth;

And there was not one that flapped its wing or opened *its* beak or chirped."

Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it?

Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?

That would be like a club wielding those who lift it,

Or like a rod lifting *him who* is not wood.

Therefore the Lord, the GOD of hosts, will send

a wasting disease among his stout warriors;

And under his glory a fire will be kindled like

a burning flame.

And the light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One

a flame,

And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in

a single day.

Here it is clear the Assyrian developed a sinful desire on its own ("For he [the Assyrian] has said" [verse 13]), not because Jah decreed that he should sin in this way. That is why the Assyrian was punished justly by God for his desire, since the Assyrian was responsible for what occurred toward Jerusalem in ways that merited punishment.—Isaiah 10:12-14.

White is correct in noting this was God's work.¹³ In fact, if White simply accepted the biblical teachings that outside of this "work" the Assyrian developed and acted in response to his own sinful desire, and that Jah was able to use this to incite the

¹³ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 47.

Assyrian against Jerusalem, then Dr. White's conflict with the Bible on this issue would not be so apparent.

In this account the Assyrian's "staff" is his desire to "cut off many nations" and this is "*his own staff*" (Isaiah 10:24), a staff Jah 'picks up' and uses against Jerusalem. In this way Jah can and does use the desires of others to accomplish his own will, which at times includes punishing others who have incurred his righteous indignation. This argues against White's claim that "God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe."¹⁴

According to the Bible, Jah wisely and perfectly decrees what will and what may come to pass. But Jah does *not* always decree what he permits others to decide, that is, other than to decree what it is that others may have the opportunity to decide in the first place! In fact, Jah may and has in the past used the disposition of others to accomplish his will, as is clear from the biblical account involving Assyria and Jerusalem.

2) Genesis 50:19-21:

But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

According to Dr. White, by his words in the above account Joseph "saw the over-riding hand of God, guiding, directing, and ultimately meaning *in the same action* to bring about good" through the intentions of his brothers.¹⁵ In so far as this is a true reflection of the Bible's teaching that God saw what was happening and then involved himself in the affairs of Joseph and his brothers in order to actively bring about his will, White is correct: "the over-riding hand of God" does actively change the course of events and Jah does 'guide' and 'direct' them according to his own decree, that is, when he *determines* to do so.

¹⁴ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 45.

¹⁵ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 48.

As White rightly points out, in the above account God “intervened” to keep Joseph from being killed by his brothers. This is an example of how Jah may keep something from happening which he knows will happen, if left alone without his further involvement. However, Jah also knew in ways unique to him (compare Psalm 7:9) that though Joseph’s brothers were jealous to the point of wanting to kill him (Genesis 37:18), they could be brought back to a point where they could *choose* to love their brother.

In this way the love of God is seen, though the desires of our heart cannot always be turned. Consider Genesis 4:3-13 according to the NWT (with underlining added):

And it came about at the expiration of some time that Cain proceeded to bring some fruits of the ground as an offering to Jehovah. But as for Abel, he too brought some firstlings of his flock, even their fatty pieces. Now while Jehovah was looking with favor upon Abel and his offering, he did not look with any favor upon Cain and upon his offering. And Cain grew hot with great anger, and his countenance began to fall. At this Jehovah said to Cain: “Why are you hot with anger and why has your countenance fallen? If you turn to doing good, will there not be an exaltation? But if you do not turn to doing good, there is sin crouching at the entrance, and for you is its craving; and will you, for your part, get the mastery over it?” After that Cain said to Abel his brother: [“Let us go over into the field.”] So it came about that while they were in the field Cain proceeded to assault Abel his brother and kill him. Later on Jehovah said to Cain: “Where is Abel your brother?” and he said: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s guardian?” At this he said: “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground. And now you are cursed in banishment from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood at your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will not give you back its power. A wanderer and a fugitive you will become in the earth.” At this Cain said to Jehovah: “My punishment for error is too great to carry.”

As with Joseph’s brothers, God “had it in mind for good” for Cain and Abel (Genesis 50:20), though Jah did not “intervene” to

the same extent he did with Cain. But God did decree whether Cain listened or not, Cain would be allowed to act according to *his* desire. Jah left Cain alone to decide and to see what happened, but after Jah lovingly admonished Cain. As it turns out, Cain did not listen to Jah's voice, just as Adam did not listen to Jah.

Cain killed his brother, and so he was justly 'punished for his error.' By contrast with the account of Cain and Abel, in the case of Joseph and his brothers Jah determined to be involved to a different extent. Yet, Jah still provided both Cain and Joseph's brothers with opportunities to determine each one's own outcome, according to the desires of their hearts.—Compare Jeremiah 11:8, 20; 13:10, 22; 16:12; 17:10; 18:12; 23:16-17; 29:13.

This shows that while the extent of Jah's initial or ultimate involvement is according to his own decree and desire, Jah may further adjust his will for the glory of his name. As the Bible teaches, at times this may even involve Jah God permitting others to have and to cultivate desires to a point where decisions are made which might contradict Jah's will, though God is always sovereign and free to permit or to end anything. There are simply times when Jah permits something to occur against his will but for the purpose of showing it as *evidence of his greatness*, in part by showing his willingness to consider contrary acts or opinions not just by some who may be unsure, but also by those who may be considered 'enemies.'—Matthew 5:43-48; compare John 3:20-21.

This brings us to White's third biblical 'witness' for the belief that "God has wisely and perfectly decreed whatsoever comes to pass in this universe":

(3) Acts 4:27-30:

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.

According to White, in this account “we find one single act, freely engaged in by evil men for evil motives, yet, at the same time, eternally predestined for good by God.”¹⁶ In this, we have one of the more critical flaws of the Reformed position stated explicitly, “eternally predestined ... by God.”

It is not enough for White or for other Reformed theologians to accept the God of the Bible as one who decrees all of the things which *can* occur. Nor do Reformers accept as sufficient a God who actively decides what may take place, *or* what he may change according to his will, for his glory. White writes that the decrees of God must be “eternally predestined.” But the word “eternally” does not appear anywhere in the above account. How, then, does this account support Dr. White?

According to Acts 4:27-30, the things that are said to have been “predestined to occur” were the things that were prophesied about, not “eternally,” but from the time in view in Psalm 2:1-2. Indeed, all such prophecies concerning the suffering of the Christ relate in some sense back to what was prophesied about the ‘bruising of the heel’ of the promised “seed,” the Messiah.—Genesis 3:15.

The evidence from the Bible shows that had Adam and Eve *not* disobeyed, rebelled, or “sinned” against Jah, then there would have been no need to ‘foreordain’ any consequential “counsel” to “occur” in response to their choices against his will. Adam and Eve may not have died. It is quite possible, even likely based on what Jah first told them, that they may have continuously ‘cultivated and took care of’ the garden of Eden, rather than be ‘driven out’ of it.—Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-17; 3:24.

In spite of having no good reasons to disobey Jah, and every good reason to listen to him, both Adam and Eve followed their own desires and in the process they rejected Jah’s sovereignty, in favor of their own. Jah permitted but did not endorse their disobedience, and he also decreed the means by which his purpose for mankind would come to pass. Since then, Jah searches the whole earth for “anyone having insight,” for anyone ‘seeking Jah’ (Psalm 14:2; compare 2 Chronicles 16:9; Zechariah

¹⁶ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 49.

3:8-9; 4:10). Jah and Jesus know our hearts' desires, and intentions (Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; Revelation 2:23). The Bible teaches that Jah is actively involved with humans. This contact may come by explicit admonitions (Genesis 4:6-7), or by Jah intervening otherwise to bring about his will.—Compare Genesis 50:20.

However, it is not always by 'wisely and perfectly *decreeing* whatsoever comes to pass in this universe' that Jah shows he is sovereign and free.¹⁷ Jah God is the Creator and the Determiner of what can happen in any created existence which he chooses to make (see Isaiah 40:27-28; 42:5; 45:18; compare 1 Corinthians 8:6). Jah wisely and perfectly causes some things to occur apart from and/or at times even in contradiction to the will and desire of others, as in the case of Joseph and his brothers.—Genesis 37:18; 50:19-21.

Jah wisely and perfectly decides what will come to pass in association with the desire of others, as with the Assyrian and Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:5-7; 12-17). Jah also wisely decrees what others can decide, apart from and at times even in direct opposition to his expressed desire, this because we are truly made in his image.—Genesis 1:27; 2:16-17; 3:6, 11, 17; 4:3-13.

The true freedom of God is seen in all of these biblical examples, and it is revealed most outstandingly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. But Jah does not need to 'get permission from anyone'¹⁸ before he does anything, though he may decree beforehand the limits of what can take place (Job 2:6). Jah is at all times sovereign and free to change or to adjust his will and purpose for his own glory. He does this also because he takes 'delight' in those who love what is true for good reasons.—Isaiah 46:10; Job 36:11; Jeremiah 7:23; John 4:24; Romans 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 2:9.

Nowhere does the Bible teach Jah "eternally predestined" any of these things. The biblical God Jah, therefore, does not resemble the God of "Reformed" theology in a very critical respect. With this in mind, consider Dr. White's comments here:

¹⁷ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 45.

¹⁸ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 41.

“Surely no one can suggest that the cross was an after-thought, a desperate attempt to ‘fix’ things after all had gone awry.”¹⁹ If White is here asking whether anyone is truly claiming that Jah freely decrees those made in his image will be allowed to decide certain matters on their own, but with God always prepared and willing to make adjustments for his glory (as he did after Adam sinned by prophesying about the future “seed” [Genesis 3:15]), then the answer is *yes!* Jehovah’s Witnesses believe these things! We believe them because the Bible teaches them, and we have good reasons for believing the Bible is accurate in presenting the history and the will of Jah God.

OASIS. Jehovah’s Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society have rejected the “Reformed” teachings concerning God’s knowledge and the free will of mankind. As a Christian Witness of Jah I, too, reject Reformed theology. Jehovah’s Witnesses of both types, then, reject the belief that Jah has by “eternal decree” predestined the salvation and condemnation of “every man” (from the Schaff quote on page 456). As representative of the beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the following is accurate in large part where it involves Jah’s foreknowledge:

Foreknowledge, Foreordination

Does God know in advance everything that people will do?

The question then arises: Is his exercise of foreknowledge infinite, without limit? Does he foresee and foreknow all future actions of all his creatures, spirit and human? And does he foreordain such actions or even predestinate what shall be the final destiny of all his creatures, even doing so before they have come into existence?

Or, is God’s exercise of foreknowledge selective and discretionary, so that whatever he chooses to foresee and foreknow, he does, but what he does not choose to foresee or foreknow, he does not? And, instead of preceding their existence, does God’s determination of his creatures’ eternal destiny await his judgment of their course of life and of their proved attitude under test? ...

¹⁹ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 48.

In contrast with the theory of predestinarianism, a number of texts point to an examination by God of a situation then current and a decision made on the basis of such examination.²⁰

The Watchtower Society's *Insight* book goes on to cite the accounts in the Bible about God's 'learning' about what was happening at "Babel" (Genesis 11:5-8), about God's 'coming to know' the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-22 and 19:1), and about God's "becoming acquainted with Abraham" after Jah learned Abraham would not withhold his only son from him (Genesis 18:19; 22:11-12). Based on the good reasons found in these accounts the Society's *Insight* book concludes, "Selective foreknowledge means that God could choose *not* to foreknow indiscriminately all the future acts of his creatures."²¹

I agree with most of what is said in the above quote from the Society's *insight* book concerning God's foreknowledge. Jehovah's Witnesses believe God, for good reasons, permits certain things to take place and that he can and even *intends to learn* from them, as we saw in the case of Adam naming the creatures which Jah brought to him (Genesis 2:19). Yet, all possible outcomes are known at all times by Jah, so nothing catches him unprepared. He is always able to deal with anything he allows, and so he is never caught unprepared. Biblical accounts such as Genesis 2:19 (Adam's naming of animals) or Genesis 22:12 (where Jah learned about Abraham's love for him) show that Jah does indeed watch our actions, to see what we will do in matters not yet foretold or determined definitively by him beforehand.

Previously, I presented and discussed Dr. White's "sixth point" of belief concerning the "doctrine of God's decrees." In this section I will present and discuss the other, more traditional "Five Points of Calvinism" using the acronym "TULIP," as presented by Dr. White.²² I will then provide a critique of these

²⁰ *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), pages 852, 853.

²¹ *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 1, page 853.

²² White, *The Potter's Freedom*, pages 38-41. In addition to White's *The Potter's Freedom* referenced in this chapter, for additional information about his views on the

“Five Points,” followed by what I have good reasons to believe are five key points of biblical teaching concerning the grace and sovereignty of Jah God. I will use my own acronym, “OASIS,” in order to make the presentation and the understanding of the issues easier to differentiate from and to appreciate in relation to Reformed theology’s use of “TULIP”:

T = Total Depravity:

Man is dead in sin, completely and radically impacted by the Fall, the enemy of God, incapable of saving himself. This does not mean that man is as evil as he could be. Nor does it mean that the image of God is destroyed, or that the will is done away with. Instead, it refers to the *all pervasiveness of the effects of sin*, and the fact that man is, outside of Christ, the enemy of God [emphasis original].²³

U = Unconditional Election:

God elects a specific people unto Himself without reference to *anything they do*. This means the basis of God’s choice of the elect is *solely* within Himself: His grace, His mercy, His will. It is not man’s actions, works, *or even foreseen faith*, that “draws” God’s choice. God’s election is unconditional *and final* [emphasis original].²⁴

L = Limited Atonement:

Since it is God’s purpose to save a special people for Himself, and He has chosen to do so *only* through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Christ came to give His life “a ransom for many” so as to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The *intention* of Christ in His cross-work was to save His people *specifically*. Therefore, Christ’s sacrifice is *perfect and complete*, for it actually *accomplishes* perfect redemption [emphasis original].²⁵

subjects of God’s grace and sovereignty, see White’s *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2001), and Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004). For additional information about my and Jehovah’s Witnesses beliefs concerning God’s purpose, his sovereignty, and the salvation of humankind, see the items referenced in note 1 to this chapter, as well as Chapter 8 in this book.

²³ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 39.

²⁴ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 39.

²⁵ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, pages 39-40.

I = Irresistible Grace:

This is the belief that God is able to raise the spiritually dead sinner to life. This is an act of *efficient* grace. When God chooses to bring one of His elect to spiritual life, it is an act similar to when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead: just as Lazarus was incapable of resisting the power of Christ in raising him from the dead, so too the dead sinner is incapable of resisting the power of God that raises him to spiritual life. This is *not* to say that men have not resisted God's grace. This doctrine speaks specifically to the grace that brings regeneration, not to individual acts of sin committed by believers or unbelievers [emphasis original].²⁶

P = Perseverance of the Saints:

Some prefer saying "the preservation of the saints" to emphasize that this is the work of God: others use the phrase "eternal security" to emphasize the impossibility of God's perfect work of salvation being undone. But whatever one calls it, it is the belief that when Christ saves one of His elect, He will not fail to keep that saved person throughout life and bring them safely into His presence. It is, in short, the belief that Christ is able to save perfectly [emphasis original].²⁷

Now I will compare and consider the above "Five Points of Calvinism" against five biblical points of belief which I believe are based on the best biblical reasons. An "oasis" is "something that provides refuge, relief, or pleasant contrast" (*Merriam-Webster*, www.merriam-webster.com, under "Oasis"). In the remainder of this section I will use the acronym "OASIS" to show the contrast between the teachings of the Bible and the "Five Points of Calvinism" advocated by White and others, who go so far as to claim that Calvinism is "but a nickname for biblical Christianity."²⁸

I contend that the teachings represented by "TULIP" are, to one degree or another, traditions of men which are unscriptural (compare Matthew 15:6). By "pleasant contrast," I will argue the five points associated with the acronym "OASIS" rightly express some of the more important biblical teachings concerning God's sovereignty and the salvation he offers to mankind. Here is my

²⁶ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 40.

²⁷ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 40.

²⁸ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 16.

comparison of “OASIS” with “TULIP” relative to these teachings:

O = Original Purpose:

Whatever Jah purposes ‘proves to be’; it ‘will not return to him without results’ (Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 55:11). Therefore, his purpose will always come to pass in a meaningful way that is acceptable to him. The Five Points of Calvinism begin with the “Total Depravity” of man after his fall into sin through disobedience to Jah in Genesis. But this “fall” into sin by disobedience is not what God had originally intended for mankind, according to the Bible. Indeed, such a “fall” is (in the Bible) *against* God’s expressed, original purpose for mankind and for the earth (see Genesis 1:27-31; 2:15-17). To accurately understand God’s will and purpose as found in the Bible, we must start with what it teaches “from the beginning” (Genesis 1:1) and from there consider what it teaches us about God, man, and about what Jah purposed to do after Adam’s fall. Thus, the very ‘First Point of Calvinism’ starts off on the wrong track by ignoring God’s original purpose and by focusing instead on *the consequences of rebellion* against Jah, which rebellion is viewed by White as part of God’s “eternal” will and purpose.

The Bible begins with God’s creation and with his purpose for mankind as found in Genesis Chapters 1 and 2. Then it presents events which changed the course of life for mankind from one that would fulfill Jah’s expressed desire, to Adam’s, to Eve’s, and to Satan’s judgment (Genesis Chapter 3). In association with his righteous judgments, Jah revealed the means of salvation for those born through Adam, namely, a promised “seed” who will bring an end to the “serpent” (Genesis 3:15). The rest of the Bible moves forward to the coming of that “seed,” to his life on earth and to his teachings about God, and ultimately to the formation of a new nation of people who will proclaim “good news” until God’s final judgment on the world.—Matthew 24:14; Revelation 21:1-4.

A = Adjustments for the Glory of His Name:

Jah is free to (and does at times) adjust the means of bringing about what he desires for the glory of his name (Revelation 15:3-4). This can be necessary if as a result of what else Jah permits some choose to disobey his expressed will (Genesis 3:15). For example, Jah wanted Adam and Eve to “fill the earth and subdue it” and to “cultivate [the garden of Eden] and to take care of it” (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). At this time, Jah God did not want Adam to eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad” (Genesis 2:16-17). But Adam ate

from it anyway. Jah permitted Adam's disobedience, but he also adjusted his will for his own glory by prophesying about that which would 'restore all things' (Acts 3:21), the "seed" of Genesis 3:15.

Consider, too, the life of Jah's servant, king Hezekiah. Though Jah decreed Hezekiah would "indeed die and will not live," Hezekiah's tears moved Jah to reconsider his original decree about how long Hezekiah would live (Isaiah 38:1-5). The end result of Jah's original decree did not change (Hezekiah did eventually die), only the time he decreed Hezekiah would live changed according to Jah's freedom and sovereignty, and for his glory: "For it is not She'ol that can laud you; death itself cannot praise you ... The living, the living, he is the one that can laud you, Just as I can this day" (Isaiah 38:18-19). While Jah may adjust his will for his glory and "for those who love him" and for those who reject him (1 Corinthians 2:9; Hebrews 6:4-6), no one can keep him from doing what he chooses to do (compare Job 35:6-7), which is always "righteous and true."—Revelation 15:3-4.

S = Salvation for All Who Believe:

As I will discuss further in the next chapter, Jah provides salvation for "everyone who believes" (Acts 13:39) or who has faith by trusting in beliefs about Jesus that are based on the best available reasons. The work Jesus "accomplished" (John 19:28-30) is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, which Jah did not decree "from all eternity" but only *after* it was necessary, or because of good reason, which in this case involved resistance by Satan and disobedience by Adam and by Eve. Jah allowed the rebellion to occur, even though the Bible shows clearly that he did not want it to happen (Genesis 3:11, 13, 14-19). Jah's prophecy was an 'adjustment for his glory' which shows he will give life to those who please him by trusting in beliefs for good reasons, the primary one of which concerns the redeeming power of Jesus' death.—John 3:16; Hebrews 11:1, 6.

However, according to the Bible "believing" or having "faith" must be accompanied by works or it is "dead." According to the Bible, "faith alone" is a "dead faith" and, thus, it cannot save anyone, but neither can "works" that are not according to a living faith save anyone, that is, unless Jah and Jesus so determine it based on the 'law that a person is to him- or to herself' (Romans 2:13-16; 27, 28; 3:28; James 2:24, 26). No one can please Jah God merely by executing a list of 'good deeds.' There is no quantity of "works" we can perform that will *earn* us life. Instead we must have faith based on good reasons in that which God provides both for a good life now and for an endless life with Jah God to come (Romans 2:6-11; James 2:20; Revelation 21:1-4). But it *is* our "works" that will serve as the basis for our judgment by God, as it is our *works* which show whether we

in fact have a living or a dead faith.—Romans 2:6-11; Revelation 20:11-13.

I = Impossible to Save Yourself:

“One there is that is lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy” (James 4:12). There is no amount of good works anyone can do to merit salvation. Jah God does not *owe* life to any of us. It is a gift! It is *his* gift! It is given to each of us based on whether we please Jah by trusting in the good reasons he provides us for belief in him and in his Son’s life and death. If we trust in the best available reasons, then we will believe in the good things Jah has done, and that he asks us to do for him, for others, and for ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). This is Jah’s will for mankind! But even if we have a saving faith, shown by our works, salvation is still a gift only for those who ‘endure in work that is good’ (Romans 2:7, 10). If we do not “endure to the end” (Mark 13:13), or if we decide to “disobey the truth” by “turning in the opposite direction” (Isaiah 50:5), then “there will be wrath and anger” from God for good reasons (Romans 2:8). Jah has decreed that each of us can choose to do good or to practice what is bad, and if we choose good then Jah will help us (compare Genesis 4:7). We are not alone in this struggle, for Jah, Jesus, and the holy spirit do help even “beyond what is normal,” that is, if we work at doing good in Jesus’ name.—John 14:13; 2 Corinthians 4:7.

God the Father will never fail us and he is always “able to save” us (James 4:12). Jesus will never fail us either, as he guides us to “fountains of waters of life” in this world and in the one that is to come (Revelation 7:17). Jah is the one who chooses those who will come to his Son for life (John 6:37-38). After having been chosen and then brought by the Father to the Son, we must “individually” believe and act based on the best available reasons (Revelation 2:23; 20:13). For Christians, “believing” in Jesus involves feeding off of his life-giving, figurative “flesh” and “blood” by accepting and working hard at trusting in Jesus and in Jah the Father (John 6:47, 53-58, 65). However, just because the Father brings someone to the Son this does not mean that same person will *choose to stay* with Jesus, and follow him “no matter where he goes” (compare Hebrews 6:4-6; Revelation 14:1-4). Such a person obviously does not *continue* to believe, though this does not mean the Son ‘lost’ or ‘drove the person away’ (John 6:37-39). We might follow another teaching or person. Indeed, though the Father brought people to Jesus when he was on the earth, “many of his disciples went off to the things behind and would no longer walk with him” (John 6:66). If we are brought to Jesus and if we stay with him by trusting in him based on the best available reasons, then we will not *lose ourselves* to the “things

behind” and “no longer walk” with Jesus.—Romans Chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15.

The freedom of Jah has decreed that we may choose to believe in Jesus or not, even after being allowed by the Father to come to him. Dr. White compares the regenerating power of God for salvation to the act of raising the dead. White writes, “[J]ust as Lazarus was incapable of resisting the power of Christ in raising him from the dead, so too the dead sinner is incapable of resisting the power of God that raises him to spiritual life.”²⁹ The Bible certainly does not teach that Christians resurrect or regenerate themselves. But the basis for each is the same, namely, the “affection” God and his Son have for people because of their living faith (John 11:3). Indeed, “[T]he hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear [Jesus’] voice and come out, those who did good things to a resurrection of life, those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment.”—John 5:28-29 (underlining added).

Further, the Bible teaches clearly that a person can “believe” or “not believe” (Matthew 21:25-32) in ways that are our own responsibility. For example, notice that in Matthew 21:25-32 Jesus makes the Jews responsible for belief because “although [they] saw [the witness that came through John, they] did not feel regret afterwards so as to believe” (underlining added). The Bible also teaches that God can ‘open a person’s eyes’ so they turn “from darkness to light ... in order for them to receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18). But God will also ‘blind’ certain people whom he now does not want to have a living faith (John 12:36-40). Jah has decreed that such ones will not “get the thought with their hearts and turn around and [be healed]” (John 12:40). If, however, the person whose eyes God chooses to “blind” and whose heart he decides to “harden” was already incapable of belief on his or her own, then why would Jah “blind” anyone or ‘harden their heart’ in order to keep them from believing? Indeed, according to Jesus it is the Father who *keeps some people from believing* by ‘blinding’ them to his witness. And so the “T” in “TULIP” is again shown to be false, that is, it shown *not* to be representative of what the Bible truly teaches.

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe God is “dependent upon man’s help for success in this work.”³⁰ Rather, it is a question of our accepting what God continues to work out or complete in us. We

²⁹ White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, page 40.

³⁰ David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterians and Reformed, 2004), page 55.

must *choose* to “keep on doing these things” in order to “make the calling and choosing ... sure” (2 Peter 1:10; compare Matthew 7:21). Further, having a living faith does not “help” God save us. It *moves* Jah to save us because he loves those who show faith. Similarly, any rejection of the Father or the Son moves Jah *not* “to revive them again to repentance” (Hebrews 6:6 [underlining added]). Thus, sinners can be “enlightened” by God and ‘partake of the holy spirit’ by believing in Jesus. But “we actually become partakers of the Christ only if we make fast our hold on the confidence we had at the beginning firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:14). God’s decree in this respect is with reference to the works we do according to a living faith, since “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”—Acts 10:34-35 (underlining added).

S = Sovereignty of God:

“My own counsel will stand, and everything that is my delight I shall do” (Isaiah 46:10 [underlining added]). Jehovah’s Witnesses believe Jah God *has* decreed all of the possible choices which others can make. These choices may either be in harmony with or apart from Jah’s will, but he is the one who decides whether anyone can choose to disobey him. Thus, Jah God is not responsible for the choices he permits us to make. *We* are responsible for the choices which lead to death, and for the choices which lead us to life by gaining God’s approval from him alone, not because we *earned* it.

The Bible teaches us that Jah is the Creator of all things (Isaiah 40:27-28; 42:5; 45:18; 1 Corinthians 8:6). It is he who decreed the capacities of individuals (spirits and humans [Genesis 1:26]) who were made in his image. It is he who created the spheres of existence (the heavens and the earth [Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 10:6]) in which the personally expressive capacities of those made in his image can make choices. Each and every single choice that has, is, or ever will be made is one that Jah God has decreed to be possible. In this sense, it can be said that Jah has ‘decreed all things’ and still remain consistent with what the Bible teaches.

Though Jah has decreed all that can be done, and though he desires for certain things to be done, there are things which “delight” him (Isaiah 46:10). Conversely, there are also things in which he takes no delight. For example, using again the example of Adam, Jah created Adam with the capacity to make some decisions on his own, including the possibility of disobedience. While Jah may permit something against his will to occur, he will also enforce the consequences of disobedience in accordance with his will (Genesis

3:19). For example, though Jah decreed death as the punishment for Adam he went further by actively 'driving the man out of the garden of Eden' and keeping him from returning to it (Genesis 3:24). Under these conditions Jah brought forth the promised "seed" (Genesis 3:15) who will return all things to Jah God for his glory (Isaiah 11:1-3; Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, 28). This is the biblical God's true sovereignty: perfect, loving, and just!

Just as "TULIP" is but a helpful means of remembering key points informing the Reformed understanding of God's sovereign will as it relates to his grace, I offer "OASIS" as a helpful way of remembering the essential points of my and of Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of the biblical teaching about the salvation offered by God according to his sovereign decree. Jah God has sovereignly decreed that those made in his image can make decisions within the spheres of heavenly and earthly existence which he has made. At the same time, Jah has made known his own desires for what is to occur, as well as the basis for his judgment.—Hebrews 4:7-13.

Reformed theology is false. It misrepresents the Bible; it misrepresents the biblical God Jah; and it misrepresents the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The Reformed position teaches "there can be no clash of wills between the Potter and the pots."³¹ But it fails to consider that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is in large part all about a "clash of wills between the Potter and the pots"! From Adam (Genesis Chapter 3) to Satan (Revelation 12:7-17), there have been and there continue to be those who oppose Jah and who "clash" their wills against his, as if we know better than the one who made us.—Revelation 20:1-2, 7-15.

The Bible's "Scroll of Life"

"Before the foundation of the world." Reformed theologians base a great deal of their belief about God's knowledge and his decrees on the meaning of Ephesians 1:3-4:

³¹ White, *The Potter's Freedom*, page 44.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him before the founding of the world. [Underlining added.]

With the above clearly in mind, consider a related excerpt from my September 27, 2006, radio discussion with Dr. Morey referenced earlier in this chapter. The following does not occur immediately after the previous excerpt (see page 456). It begins in minute 40 of the radio interview. I will, however, number the following excerpt in sequence from the previous excerpt, for ease of reference. Here is the excerpt:

[13]Morey: We know that we are to go to the New Testament for the final revelation of God. There, for example, we are told in terms that are explicitly clear in the Greek, in Ephesians 1:4. It's *pro kataboles kosmo*, "*Before the creation of the world*."

[14]Stafford: No, it doesn't say that.

[15]Morey: God's plan of redemption had already ...

[16]Stafford: It's says, "before the throwing down..." You just misquoted the scripture.

[17]Morey: "Before." *Pro kataboles kosmos*.

[18]Stafford: *Kataboles* [means (signal interruption)] the "laying down."

[19]Morey: And there the word, if you look in any lexicon...

[20]Stafford: You said, "creation." That is not accurate. Now let me respond to what you said.

[21]Morey: Oh, really? You mean the lexicons are wrong? I have the lexicons in front of me.

[22]Stafford: I'm telling you that you are wrong in saying that *kataboles kosmos* means the creation of the world inclusive of Adam and Eve.

[23]Morey: Yes it does.

The transcription of **[11]Morey** and **[13]Morey** clearly show that Dr. Morey believes the Greek expression *pro kataboles kosmou* means “before the foundation/creation of the world,” which for Morey also means “from all eternity.” During our discussion of this point I expressed my disagreement, and I explained my belief that “before the foundation of the world” means “before the throwing down of seed,” or before the time when Adam and Eve “founded” the world with their “seed” or “offspring.” “Before” that time, and not necessarily “from all eternity,” is when Jah chose those who would belong to his Son, namely, when he promised a “seed” which would include them all.—Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 1:4.

“Before the founding of the world” in Ephesians 1:4 and in other New Testament (NT) texts uses a common preposition for “before” (Greek: *pro*) followed by *kataboles kosmou*, forms of the Greek nouns *katabole* (“foundation”) and *kosmos* (“world”). Consider how the NT uses the expression, “before the foundation of the world,” and how it uses *katabole* (“foundation”) alone. Since Morey referred to “the lexicons” as support for his use of “creation,” as a starting point I will provide a definition for *katabole*:

[**Katabole**:] (1) the act of laying someth. down, with implication of providing a base for someth., *foundation* ... (2) ... *sowing* of seed, used of begetting.³²

There is no explicit mention of “creation” here. However, what I object to is Morey’s use of “creation” in the expression, “creation of the world,” which Morey understands as “the creation of the world inclusive of Adam and Eve,” not as the world of mankind which came into being through and *after* them.

Since I believe there are good reasons for understanding the act of begetting or of conceiving children as a type of “creation,” if Morey had used “before the creation of the world” (**[13]Morey**) to refer to the time “before” the “creation” of Adam and Eve’s

³² *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 515.

children, but after Adam and Eve, then we would not be debating whether the time in question is “from all eternity.” But there is disagreement between Jehovah’s Witnesses, Reformed thinkers, and others over this issue, in large part *precisely* because Reformed believers (like Morey, and White) understand “before the creation/foundation of the world” to mean “from all eternity” (see above transcript, next to [11]Morey, on page 457). Therefore, I will now examine each use of *katabole* in the NT.

All but one of the eleven occurrences of *katabole* that are found in the NT are also listed in the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (see note 32) entry for this word, under definition (1), that is, except for Hebrews 11:11, which this lexicon references under definition (2).

Nine of the eleven times *katabole* occurs in the NT it is a part of the expression *kataboles kosmou* (“foundation of the world”). The two exceptions are Matthew 13:35 and Hebrews 11:11. This lexicon also gives eight separate entries for *kosmos*, of which I believe the following meanings are possible where it concerns the use of *kosmos* when a part of the expression *kataboles kosmou*:

[**Kosmos:**] (3) the sum total of everything here and now, *the world, the (orderly) universe* ... (4) the sum total of all beings above the level of the animals, *the world* ... (5) planet earth as a place of inhabitation, *the world* ... (6) humanity in general, *the world* ... (7) the system of human existence in its many aspects, *the world*.³³

The present discussion concerns the kind of “foundation” that is meant in the expression “before the foundation of the world.” Once this has been identified, it will help identify the period of time with which it is associated. Therefore, I will consider the use of *katabole* (“foundation,” or “sowing seed,” “begetting”) in the NT in order to determine what sense should be associated with the use of the same word in Ephesians 1:4. I will also further consider how the word for “world” (Greek: *kosmos*) can be

³³ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., pages 561-563.

understood, since it is also a part of the dispute involving the meaning of the expression, "before the foundation of the world."

According to Morey, "before the foundation/creation of the world" means "from all eternity" ([11]Morey). I believe, as I said to him during the September 27, 2006, radio show referenced earlier, that this expression means "'before' Adam and Eve had children," and so also "before the throwing down of seed" ([12]Stafford).

To better understand the meaning of the eleven NT uses of *katabole* ("foundation"), and especially the meaning of the expression *kataboles kosmou* ("foundation of the world"), I will present each of these texts according to the NWT and then I will highlight the word or expression under consideration. I will then discuss the meaning of the text in its historical context:

(1) Matthew 13:35 (with verse 34):

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds by illustrations. Indeed, without an illustration he would not speak to them; that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet who said: "I will open my mouth with illustrations, I will publish things hidden since the founding."

The underlined words are translated from the Greek words *apo* ("from") and *kataboles* (again, "founding" or "foundation"). Here *kataboles* is not associated with *kosmos* ("world"). Rather, it is "from" (*apo*) a time where the "things" Jesus is making known are "hidden" means of illustrations. The 'hidden things' Jesus taught by illustration in Matthew 13 all have to do with "the sacred secrets of the kingdom of the heavens" (Matthew 13:11) or, as illustrated by Jesus in Matthew 13:3-9, "the word of the kingdom" (13:19). See also Jesus' illustrations in Matthew 13:24-30, 31-32, and verse 33, which are about the "kingdom of the heavens." Note also the following NT text which further explains what is meant by "the founding" mentioned in Matthew 13:35:

(2) Matthew 25:34:

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, YOU who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom

prepared for YOU from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].”

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, in Genesis 3:15 Jah prophesied or ‘foreknew’ (Greek: form of *proginosko*) Jesus’ sacrifice “before the founding of the world” (1 Peter 1:19-20 [discussed further below]). Since Jah is God and sovereign over all things, his purpose will come to pass as he decrees (Isaiah 55:11). Also, according to Genesis 3:15, Jah’s decree since Eve’s and Adam’s sins involves a “seed” who will ‘crush Satan in the head.’ It is the “seed” of the woman (Genesis 3:15), who is also the “seed” of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), who is given “rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve” God’s Son.—Daniel 7:14.

But this “kingdom” has also been prepared for those who are said to “belong to Christ,” those who are also literally and figuratively “Abraham’s seed” (Genesis 13:14-16; Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:29). These ‘take possession of the kingdom itself,’ and “all the rulerships will serve and obey even *them*” (Daniel 7:22, 27). According to the Bible, the ‘preparations’ for this kingdom have been taking place “from the founding of the world,” which began *after* Adam’s disobedience.

Here is the third example:

(3) Luke 11:50 (with verses 49 and 51):

On this account the wisdom of God [Jesus (Matthew 23:34)] also said, ‘I will send forth to them prophets and apostles, and they will kill and persecute some of them, so that the blood of all the prophets spilled from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*] may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel down to the blood of Zech·a·ri’ah, who was slain between the altar and the house.

In this account Jesus himself defines the “founding of the world” when he says that “*from* the founding of the world” is “*from ... Abel*” (italics added to both), for Abel was one of the first two children begotten by Adam and Eve. But Abel is the one who is named (not Cain) as he was the first “prophet” whose

“blood [was] spilled from the founding of the world.” From this time, Abel was the first “prophet” whose blood was “spilled.”

(4) John 17:24 (with verse 25):

Father, as to what you have given me, I wish that, where I am, they also may be with me, in order to behold my glory that you have given me, because you loved me before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*]. Righteous Father, the world has, indeed, not come to know you; but I have come to know you, and these have come to know that you sent me forth.

Jesus here refers to his pre-human existence with the Father in the heavens (John 3:13; 6:38 [see Chapter 3]), and the love the Father had for him “before” he was ‘sent forth,’ “before” even the “founding of the world.” I understand this “founding” to be the same “founding” or “foundation” referred to in the examples considered to this point. This means the Father loved the Son “before” the time when Adam and Eve began to have children, and their children came to be the “world” that God “so loved” (John 3:16), though he loved the Son “before” he loved us.—John 3:35.

(5) Ephesians 1:4 (with verses 3 and 5):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*], that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love. For he foreordained us to the adoption through Jesus Christ as sons to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

“Before the founding of the world” God chose people in connection with his prophecy concerning the promised “seed,” either specifically due to the defined personality that would be born through the families of the earth, or as a general type or class of people in whom he takes delight (Psalm 147:11; Isaiah 46:10; Romans 2:10-11; 1 Corinthians 2:9). These are the ones whom Jah chose “according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians

1:5). Then he molds those whom he chooses like clay so they “walk in” the works he has prepared for them (Romans 8:28-29; 9:21-23; Ephesians 2:10), just as he did for his Son.—John 12:49; 14:10.

There is nothing in Ephesians 1:4 or in its context or in the greater context of the NT as a whole which defines God’s choice of people for adoption as his “sons” as “from all eternity.” There are instead good reasons for understanding God’s choices as occurring in association with his prophecy of the promised “seed,” whom he also chose “before the founding of the world” (Genesis 3:15).

Just as God has ‘prepared a kingdom from the founding of the world’ (Matthew 25:34), he has also ‘chosen’ those who will be adopted as his sons, “and if a son, also an heir through God” (Galatians 4:7). Just as he “foreordained” that his Son would “bruise” the head of the “serpent” (Satan), Jah also “foreordained” or “defined beforehand” (Greek: *pro'orisis*) those who “belong” to the promised “seed.”—Galatians 3:29.

Jah knows “beforehand” those whom he “patterned after the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29), because he made them (compare Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5). Jah ‘defined them beforehand’ even as he defined his Son according to his own image (John 14:9; Colossians 1:15). But even though they are so defined or “patterned” beforehand, these ‘adopted sons’ must still do the Father’s will (Matthew 7:21; 12:50; 1 John 2:17). God prepares people and their works. But *we* “walk in them,” though without any basis for boasting, as if we did something more than what we should have done or could have done at all without God, on whom we all depend.—Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-10.

(6) Hebrews 4:3 (with verses 4 and 5):

For we who have exercised faith do enter into the rest, just as he has said: “So I swore in my anger, ‘They shall not enter into my rest,’” although his works were finished from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*]. For in one place he has said of the seventh day as follows: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works,” and again in this place: “They shall not enter into my rest.”

Here the 'finishing of his works' is said to have taken place "from the founding of the world," which is tied to the time of the "seventh day" of Genesis 2:2. It is on this same seventh day that Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel "with the aid of Jehovah" (Genesis 4:1-2). With the background of Genesis 2:2 here in view, and based on the definitions for "world" given earlier, "founding of the world" in Hebrews 3:4 likely refers to the time from Cain and Abel, as in Luke 11:50-51.

(7) Hebrews 9:26 (with verse 25):

Neither is it in order that he [Jesus Christ] should offer himself often, as indeed the high priest enters into the holy place from year to year with blood not his own. Otherwise, he would have to suffer often from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*]. But now he has manifested himself once for all time at the conclusion of the systems of things to put sin away through the sacrifice of himself.

The 'suffering' of Jesus here again has to do with the prophecy about the "seed" according to Genesis 3:15, where Jah prophesied that Satan would "bruise" the "seed ... in the heel." Redeemable sins began first with those committed by Adam and Eve's children, for they sinned as sinners (Psalm 51:5) while Adam and Eve sinned while sinless. When Jesus came to the earth he offered himself "once for all time" for those who have trusted in God through Jesus "from the founding of the world." Jesus did not "offer himself often," as was the case with the sacrifices offered according to the laws given through Moses.

The time referred to as the "founding of the world" in Hebrews 9:26 appears to be during the seventh day of God's rest. The "offering" Jesus made would have to take effect starting at least with the first persons for whom such an offering could be made. Unless a person believes for good reasons that Adam's and Eve's sins were redeemable by Jesus' sacrifice, then the first redeemable people were "from the founding of the world" were Cain and Abel.

(8) Hebrews 11:11 (with verse 12):

By faith also Sarah herself received power to conceive [*katabolen*] seed, even when she was past the age limit, since she esteemed him faithful who had promised. Hence also from one [man], and him as good as dead, there were born [children] just as the stars of heaven for multitude and as the sands that are by the seaside, innumerable.

This account uses *katabole* explicitly for conception, or “(2) ... *sowing* of seed.” Therefore, no further comment on this text is needed. Here is the ninth example:

(9) 1 Peter 1:20 (with verses 17-19):

Furthermore, if YOU are calling upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves with fear during the time of YOUR alien residence. For YOU know that it was not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, that YOU were delivered from YOUR fruitless form of conduct received by tradition from YOUR forefathers. But it was with precious blood, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, even Christ’s. True, he was foreknown before the founding of the world [*pro kataboles kosmou*], but he was made manifest at the end of the times for the sake of YOU.

Here the use of “before the founding of the world” reminds me of the usage in Ephesians 1:4, in that it speaks of that which was “foreknown” but not actually made manifest until long after the time when it was foreknown. In this case, as with Ephesians 1:4, Jesus’ sacrificial “blood” was foreknown from the time of Genesis 3:15, regarding the ‘bruising’ of the “seed’s” “heel.” In this prophecy, Jah ‘foreknew’ the death of the Christ “before the foundation of the world,” which death was necessary only after Adam and Even sinned by disobeying God.

(10) Revelation 13:8:

And all those who dwell on the earth will worship it [the “wild beast”]; the name of not one of them stands written in the scroll of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered, from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].

Here we have basically the same teaching as in 1 Peter 1:20, namely, that Jesus' death was "foreknown before the founding of the world, but he was made manifest at the end of the times." Revelation 13:8 speaks about this death with such certainty that it is as if it actually happened "from the founding of the world." But according to Hebrews 9:26 this was not necessary since Jesus offered "himself once for all time at the conclusion of the systems of things" (underlining added). The 'slaughtering' of the "Lamb" mentioned in the above example is again a reference to the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, about the 'bruising of the seed's heel,' a prophecy that was given "before the founding of the world."

(11) Revelation 17:8:

The wild beast that you saw was, but is not, and yet is about to ascend out of the abyss, and it is to go off into destruction. And when they see how the wild beast was, but is not, and yet will be present, those who dwell on the earth will wonder admiringly, but their names have not been written upon the scroll of life from the founding of the world [*apo kataboles kosmou*].

"The scroll of life." It is not said to have names written in it "from all eternity," or even "*before* the founding of the world," but rather "from the founding of the world." Since "death" did not even 'enter into the world' until Adam's sin (Romans 5:12), a "scroll of life" like this one would not have been needed before that time. After death resulted from sin through Adam and Eve, then "from" the time of their children the "world" of mankind that "God so loved" (John 3:16), the "scroll of life" has been open with names written in (Revelation 17:8) and names 'wiped out' of it (Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28). But what exactly is this "scroll of life" and, more importantly, on what basis are the names of people "written upon" or "wiped out" of it?

"The Scroll of Life." Jah never intended for humankind to die (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:3). He gave Adam and Eve life (Genesis 2:7), and Jah gave them the earth and all that is in it, along with his great love and blessing (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6-8). Indeed, as noted in the texts in Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:3, the first time

death is mentioned in the Bible is in connection with mankind's disobedience to the one who made us. Jah made humans in his image (Genesis 1:26) and he gave us the authority and the ability to make certain choices on our own, within our created sphere of existence. This is "free will." It is because of this "free will" that apart from any enslavement to sin Adam and Eve were able to disobey Jah God, even for no good reason.—Genesis 3:6.

Since "sin entered into the world and death through sin" (Romans 5:12), humans have been unable to completely satisfy Jah God to the point where he will let us live forever before him without redemption. No one has earned his or her own salvation, or that of another (Psalm 3:8; 37:9; 49:7; 2 Timothy 1:9), except for Jesus of Nazareth (Hebrews 4:15; 5:8-10). But Jah God takes delight in many who choose to love him, who trust him, who put faith in him and in his Son. To such ones, Jah chooses to give salvation and life everlasting apart from sin and death.—Psalm 18:19; James 2:5.

In the previous section I presented Revelation 17:8, which speaks in part about those who "wonder admiringly" at the "wild beast," and how "their names have not been written upon the scroll of life from the founding of the world." From this NT text it is clear that a "scroll of life" has been prepared "from the founding of the world." Some names are not written in this "scroll" (such as those who 'admire' the "wild beast") while other names are "written down in the book" (Daniel 12:1). Some names can even be "blotted" or "wiped" out of this "scroll," which means of course that the "blotted" or "wiped" out names were once in the "scroll of life," but then removed from it.—Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28; Revelation 3:5.

In association with what has been presented in this chapter, I believe there are sufficient good reasons for understanding "the scroll of life from the founding of the world" as an ongoing record of names of people who have been "bought" by Jah, or given life by means of Jesus' blood, "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9; 7:13-14). Those who are not written in the "scroll of life," as well as those who are "wiped out" of it, will not receive this life. Jah 'pays attention and listens' to the affairs of men and women, and he keeps "a

book of remembrance ... for those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name.”—Malachi 3:16.

Jesus Christ also has authority over this “scroll” or “book” of life, for he promises not to “blot out” any of the names of those who “conquer” (Revelation 3:5). Conquering in this way means ‘observing [Jesus’] deeds down to the end’ (Revelation 2:26). Those who ‘carry on a disgusting thing and a lie’ (Revelation 21:27) will not be written in it.

But ‘conquering’ in this way does not mean that those who do so are responsible for their own salvation. Was the evil-doer who died alongside Jesus, but who asked Jesus to ‘remember [him] when [Jesus] gets into [his] kingdom,’ responsible for his own salvation because of that one act of faith (Luke 23:42)? Consider the entire account:

Luke 23:39-43

But one of the hung evildoers began to say abusively to him: “You are the Christ, are you not? Save yourself and us.” In reply the other rebuked him and said: “Do you not fear God at all, now that you are in the same judgment? And we, indeed, justly so, for we are receiving in full what we deserve for things we did; but this [man] did nothing out of the way.” And he went on to say: “Jesus, remember me when you get into your kingdom.” And he said to him: “Truly I tell you today, You will be with me in Paradise.”³⁴ [Underlining added.]

The evil-doer “rebuked” his fellow criminal. He admitted that he was deserving of death. And he expressed his faith in Jesus by asking him to “remember” him. By means of these things, this one showed that he ‘feared God’ unlike the other criminal. During this time, perhaps more so than any other time in this history of the earth (with the Son’s death before him), Jah the Father was “paying attention and listening” (Malachi 3:16). Indeed:

³⁴ For a discussion about the punctuation and translation of Jesus’ words in Lu 23:43 according to the NWT and other NT translations, see Appendix A in my Second Edition of this book (2000), pages 545-560. See also my more recent, “Punctuation in Early Greek New Testament Texts,” *Elihu Online Papers 3* (September 4, 2010 [rev. February 7, 2011]), pages 12, 21-26 (available through www.elihubooks.com).

Romans 2:6-10

And he will render to each one according to his works: everlasting life to those who are seeking glory and honor and incorruptibleness by endurance in work that is good; however, for those who are contentious and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness there will be wrath and anger, tribulation and distress, upon the soul of every man who works what is injurious, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory and honor and peace for everyone who works what is good. [Underlining added.]

Jah and Jesus understand that we are sinners, who at times fail to do what is right and who instead do what is wrong. But there is a clear difference between failing at times while trying to do what is right and being “contentious” while ‘disobeying the truth and obeying unrighteousness.’ While we must let God judge such things ultimately, when we do fail we must be strong, and we must have hope. For Jah has given those who believe and those who trust in him, in spite of our sin, the means for a peaceful life with him:

1 John 2:1-6

My little children, I am writing YOU these things that YOU may not commit a sin. And yet, if anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. And he is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet not for ours only but also for the whole world’s. And by this we have the knowledge that we have come to know him, namely, if we continue observing his commandments. He that says: “I have come to know him,” and yet is not observing his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this [person]. [Underlining added.]

Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Christian Witnesses of Jah, must never let the salvation God offers through Jesus become a burden (compare Matthew 11:30). Lovers of Jah and Jesus do not cause others to think less of themselves and about their relationship with God because they have not “done enough,” according to human standards. We can *never* ‘do enough,’ if by “enough” it is

meant that we can earn a righteous standing before God on our own. Those who try to do so or who create a false hope in others by having them believe that loyalty to men is the same thing as loyalty to God, have put themselves “in opposition” to and have lifted themselves “up over everyone who is called ‘god’ or an object of reverence.”—2 Thessalonians 2:4.

If we instead continue “observing *his* commandments,” we can be assured that if we do sin then we can trust that we will be forgiven. But Christians should do everything possible to avoid falling into the trap of pleasing men, as if man’s commands are God’s commands (compare Isaiah 29:13). *Listen to Jah! Listen to Jesus.* Question *mankind*. By this I do not mean we cannot learn from each other, or listen to the teachings of those who are “working hard ... in [the] Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:12). But “put them to the test,” and if they do not pass then reject them as “liars,” for this is the way of Jesus of Nazareth.—Revelation 2:2.

As Christians, we are also told to “be in subjection to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except by God” (Romans 13:1). Listening to or subjecting ourselves to others does not mean we “believe every inspired expression.” If our beliefs are based on good reasons, then we can “test the inspired expressions to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.”—1 John 4:1.

Each of us knows what is right and what is wrong once we reach a certain age (Isaiah 7:15-16). It is our responsibility, therefore, to do what we can to show with good reasons that the ways of Jah are “righteous and true” (Revelation 15:3-4), even as he judges us ‘individually according to our deeds’:

Revelation 20:11-13

And I saw a great white throne and the one seated on it. From before him the earth and the heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and scrolls were opened. But another scroll was opened; it is the scroll of life. And the dead were judged out of those things written in the scrolls according to their deeds. And the sea gave up those dead in it, and death and

Ha'des gave up those dead in them, and they were judged individually according to their deeds. [Underlining added.]

Chapter Summary

Though we are judged according to our “deeds,” no one can earn salvation. It is a gift! It is given to those who did not earn it, who cannot earn it, and who should be ever thankful and gracious by showing respect and honor “to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:10). It is the freedom of Jah that allowed Adam to choose life or death in Eden, and it is Jah’s freedom which permits us to believe in him now and to live “with everlasting life in view through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Romans 5:21.

Some today believe Jah determined all things “from eternity,” and that he therefore cannot learn from what he creates. But the Bible does not support either of these teachings, and in fact what the Bible does teach about the foreknowledge of Jah contradicts Reformed theology. Jah God can and has changed some of his decrees, and he even ‘felt regret’ and allowed others made in his image to “soften” him with good reasons.—Exodus 32:11-14.

The “scroll of life from the founding of the world” may have names written in (Revelation 17:8) and names ‘wiped’ or ‘blotted out’ (Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28; Revelation 3:5). None of us can earn salvation. It is God’s gift (Ephesians 2:8). Though life is a gift from the Father, the choices we make will in large part determine whether God chooses to find us “acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35).

If we rely on Jesus’ sacrifice for forgiveness, we can make choices which show our faith and love for what is right while we fight with ourselves against doing what is bad (Romans 7:16-20). This way we can fight against slavery to sin and use our “free will” to do good, as Joseph did:

Genesis 39:7-9

Now after these things it came about that the wife of his master began to raise her eyes toward Joseph and say: “Lie down with me.” But he would refuse and would say to his master’s wife: “Here my master does not know what is with me in the house,

and everything he has he has given into my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I am, and he has not withheld from me anything at all except you, because you are his wife. So how could I commit this great badness and actually sin against God?" [Underlining added.]

Being a slave of sin by being a child born through Adam and Eve did not force Joseph to sin in this instance. He *chose* to resist his sinful nature and to reject Potiphar's wife. This illustrates the biblical teaching concerning the free will of mankind, as did the criminal who believed just as he was about to die alongside Jesus. *Then*, after *his* belief, Jesus gave him the promise of life, not because he earned it at the end of his life; it was because he believed and trusted Jesus would "remember" him (Luke 23:42-43). That trust is all one needs to receive the "free gift of God."—John 4:10.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christian Witnesses of Jah reject Reformed theology, for we believe it to be a contradiction to the biblical teachings concerning Jah's sovereignty, his decrees, and the "free will" of mankind. Reformed theology, like many other unbiblical theologies, uses biblical words and it will cite and quote the Bible as if it supports what it teaches. I, too, have used biblical words, cited scripture, and quoted it where appropriate to support my claims and to defend the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. Now each person must take up the challenge of evaluating each side to see who has presented the best available reasons for belief.

While I have defended Jehovah's Witnesses on the subjects considered in this chapter, this must be understood within the context of the present separation of Jehovah's Witnesses into those who are loyal to the men who control the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and those Jehovah's Witnesses who reject traditions of men that can be shown to contradict the best available reasons for belief found in the Bible. Many of these latter ones, including myself, make this separation clear to all by bearing witness to Jah and to Jesus as Christian Witnesses (see Chapter 10).

While these two groups of Witnesses agree on many biblical teachings, the loyalty of the former group to the Watchtower Society means that they refuse in large part to stand up publicly and

to debate false teachers by “overturning reasonings and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God,” as well as by “bringing every thought into captivity to make it obedient to the Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The Christian Witnesses of Jah will not follow the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in allowing “deceivers of the mind” to continue ‘disrespecting’ Jah’s name to the extent they have done (Psalm 74:10, 18; Titus 1:10), or that they anyone else does so from here forward. The same “test” must be continually, lovingly applied to any one of us who claims to speak in Jah’s or in Jesus’ name.—Revelation 2:2.³⁵

Therefore, if we are only “two or three” we can become more. Every Christian Witness of Jah should be ready to wisely and mercifully help others, and to teach what is true for good reasons in Jesus’ name, and for Jah’s name, for his glory, and for the praise which our own human experience and life should repeatedly show us he clearly deserves according to the best available reasons.—Matthew 18:20; John 7:18; Romans 10:10; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 4:11; 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

³⁵ For more on the translation, meaning, and the application of this text in literature published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society see my more recent article, “Put Them to the Test,” *Watching the Ministry* (July 7, 2011), available through www.elihubooks.com.

8

Salvation

In Chapter 7 I considered and compared Reformed theology with the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses where it concerns God's sovereignty, the "free will" of mankind, and the gift Jah gives to those who trust him. In Chapter 7 I believe I also provided a sufficient consideration of some of the more important issues involved in this debate. I believe I provided enough evidence from the Bible to show that in his freedom Jah may choose to become directly involved with his creatures, or he may give others a measure of freedom to act within the spheres of existence which he has made, even to the point of disobeying his expressed will.—Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6, 11-12, 17-19.

Of course, the freedom Jah gives others to live and to move and to act before him in any sense is limited to what Jah permits. Jah has defined all of the things that any of his creatures may do, and because he can at any time bring about his will Jah "knows all things," though he does not foreordain all things "from eternity." In the previous chapter I also used the acronym "OASIS" in presenting the biblical teaching concerning: 1) Jah's "O"riginal purpose for mankind; 2) "A"djutments to Jah's decrees which he makes for the glory of his name; 3) "S"alvation for all who believe in Jah and in Jesus; 4) "I"mpossible to save ourselves; and 5) Jah's true "S"overeignty and freedom as the one who determines everything that can happen.

In this chapter I will further defend the beliefs and teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses concerning the salvation of mankind, to the extent that their beliefs are based on the best available, biblical reasons. But I will give no defense for the teachings of the Governing Body associated with their Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, where it concerns their ongoing efforts to have

others respond to them “as we would to the voice of God, because it is His provision.”¹

The Watchtower Society and those Jehovah's Witnesses loyal to it have presented such teachings consistently for decades. In addition to requiring that other Witnesses listen to them as “the voice of God,” while at the same time teaching that rebellion against the Governing Body and its associates “is rebellion against God,”² compare the similarities between the following citations from *The Watchtower* which are separated by about fifty years (with underlining added):

1950:

Jehovah's visible organization can use you, but can get along without you too. But you cannot get along without it. ... All must associate together, get the life-giving spiritual food that God circulates to his people through the organization, get the new truths that take away old ideas and the admonition that keeps down queer personal ideas ... Don't become a withered branch or a paralyzed foot. Don't amputate yourself from the organization and commit spiritual suicide.—John 15:1-8.³

¹ “Overseers of Jehovah's People,” *The Watchtower*, June 15, 1957, page 370, par. 7. Compare this with what was written in *The Watchtower* nearly fifty years later (with underlining added):

We now come to the matter of being loyal to Jehovah's visible organization. Certainly, we owe loyalty to it ... If [some who left the organization] had been loyal to the organization and to their brothers, they would have waited on Jehovah to clarify these matters, which he did in his due time. Thus, loyalty includes waiting patiently until further understanding is published by the faithful and discreet slave [“Meeting the Challenge of Loyalty,” *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1996, pages 16-17, par. 9].

But what if those who left the organization did so *because of loyalty to God*, as opposed to “loyalty to the organization” or even loyalty “to their brothers”? Which loyalty is worth more: Loyalty to Jah and to Jesus or loyalty to men and to our organizations? For the Watchtower Society, these are all at times on the same or level or so related to each other that the Society is comfortable teaching, “loyalty to God also includes loyalty to his organization” (“What Does It Mean To Be Loyal?” *The Watchtower*, October 1, 2001, page 22). Christian Witnesses of Jah will never make such claims, that is, if we are truly Jehovah's Witnesses rather than witnesses of men.

² “Keep Pace by Conforming to Theocratic Requirements,” *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1956, page 346.

³ “Who Will Share in the Final Witness?” *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1950, page 26, par. 22.

2000:

[After quoting a portion of Matthew 25:31-46 about Jesus' illustration concerning the sheep and the goats:] Though the judging and separating will be done "when the Son of man arrives in his glory," the preaching work is providing people today with the opportunity to recognize Christ's spiritual brothers [which includes the Watchtower Society's Governing Body] and thus to work in support of them for their own eternal salvation.—Matthew 25:31-46.⁴

2000:

You should also feel a sense of loyalty to "the faithful and discreet slave" and the agencies that are used to disseminate spiritual "food at the proper time." (Matthew 24:45-47) Be quick to read and apply the information found in *The Watchtower* and its companion publications.⁵

The meaning of the above quotations is clear: No one can "get along" without the Watchtower organization and a Christian must "feel a sense of loyalty" to the Governing Body and to its "agencies," all of whom give Witnesses the "opportunity" to "work in support of them for their own eternal salvation." The Watchtower Society publishes such things knowing full and well its own history of false teachings involving Bible chronology and prophecy, as well as other significant changes which have had significant consequences on the lives of many people.⁶

The Christian Witnesses of Jah reject any attempt to force others to accept the Watchtower Society in inappropriate ways. This includes being loyal to them where they teach things which are not supported by the best available reasons. The Christian Witnesses of Jah do not seek to 'please men,' but God (Galatians 1:10). Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses today who cling to a human organization regardless of its teachings and conduct are

⁴ "Keep Your 'Hope of Salvation' Bright!" *The Watchtower*, June 1, 2000, pages 13-14.

⁵ "Are You a 'Full-Grown' Christian?" *The Watchtower*, August 15, 2000, page 28.

⁶ See my Second and Third Dissertations in *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002), for information on the changes in the Society's teachings on chronology, and in regards to doctrinal matters such as the use of blood, ministerial activities, and the celebration of holidays.

not Jehovah's Witnesses. They are Witnesses of the men whom they follow, to whom they are "loyal."

As I have indicated throughout this book, and as I will discuss again in Chapter 10, Christian Witnesses of Jah are Jehovah's Witnesses who have separated from those who care more about loyalty to men, or the size and extent of their human organizations than they do about beliefs that are truly based on the best available reasons. Therefore, in what follows I will present and defend the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses on the biblical teaching concerning the salvation of mankind, but only where such teachings do not include or promote "a sense of loyalty" to anyone but to Jah God, and to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

'Earning Their Salvation'?

The Witnesses' view of salvation and works. By contrast with "Reformed" theology, the Roman Catholic religion believes that in addition to God's grace man can merit certain graces necessary for sanctification (a perfecting of the "soul" that allows a person to live with God as a "new creation" [see 2 Corinthians 5:17-18]) and salvation. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life.⁷

While there are considerable differences between the Roman Catholic Church's concept of grace and salvation and that of Jehovah's Witnesses, there are more similarities between them than there are between "Reformed" theology and Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, both Jehovah's Witnesses and Catholics disagree with the Protestant view that salvation is by faith *alone*,

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), section 2010, pages 541-542. Emphasis in the above quotation is original to the source quoted.

apart from works. Jehovah's Witnesses and Catholics believe a "faith without works is dead," that a living faith *must* have works, and so we cannot have a living or a saving faith without works.—James 2:26.

In spite of such similarities, Jehovah's Witnesses do not share Catholicism's view of the sacraments and Catholics do not share the Witnesses view that there are two groups of individuals whom Jah through Jesus will save, namely: 1) a "great crowd" of "mankind" who will live on earth forever (Revelation 7:15; 21:1-4), and 2) one hundred and forty-four thousand (144,000) individuals who will rule "over the earth" with Jesus for "a thousand years" (Revelation 5:9-10; 14:1-3). Though Jehovah's Witnesses view each of these two groups differently in terms of their purpose in God's "new heavens" and "new earth" (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4), they do not differentiate between those who will live in the "new earth" or in the "new heaven" when it comes to the faith accompanied by works which is necessary for a person to be saved.

However, though Jehovah's Witnesses (including those associated with and loyal to the Watchtower Society) believe and teach that "none of us are in a position to earn God's gifts, least of all to earn the gift of life,"⁸ it is not uncommon for Witness critics to claim that Witnesses view their "works" in such a way that they can "earn their salvation."⁹ Many of these anti-Witness writings distort a good deal of information which has been put forth by the Watchtower Society, as I intend to show in this chapter.

Yet, those Witnesses loyal to the Watchtower Society are faced with the problem of believing "no one can earn God's favor and blessing by formal acts of worship or charitable deeds, regardless of their nature and the extent to which they are performed,"¹⁰ and explaining why the Society has consistently and repeatedly required that those who want to please Jah and Jesus must "work in support of [the Governing Body and its 'agencies']" for "eternal salvation."

⁸ "Appreciating God's Gifts," *The Watchtower*, August 15, 1952, page 485.

⁹ Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), page 284.

¹⁰ "Why Do What Is Right?" *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1980, page 3.

Jehovah's Witnesses who are Christian Witnesses of Jah rather than Witnesses for men are not required to explain such things anymore, because we reject as unscriptural the belief that we must 'work in support' of any man for our 'eternal salvation.' Therefore, I will now move forward and further consider the biblical basis for the Witnesses' teaching that faith *alone* is not enough for salvation. I will do this first by considering the kind of "works" Witnesses believe a living, saving faith must have.

What kind of faith saves? Several works written against the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses¹¹ reference an article in the February 15, 1983, issue of *The Watchtower*, "You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth—But How?" In this *Watchtower* article there are "four requirements" listed which are presented as necessary for those who will live "upon [God's] Paradise earth." Since Bowman is the one who provides the most detailed consideration of the four requirements found in this *Watchtower* article, in what follows I will primarily focus on what he has written about these and other issues related to the Witnesses' teachings concerning salvation.

The first requirement listed on page 12 of this *Watchtower* article involves "taking in knowledge" (John 17:3). But this article specifically refers to "knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ," which includes "knowledge of God's purposes regarding the earth and of Christ's role as earth's King." Bowman's response, in part, is to say that "the idea that one must study Watchtower literature to be saved is patently unbiblical." While what Bowman writes is true in one sense, Bowman misses the point of this particular article which *nowhere* says anything about having to "study Watchtower literature to be saved."

However, part of the problem facing Witnesses loyal to the Watchtower Society is they have published teachings which resemble Bowman's characterization of this *Watchtower* article's 'first requirement.' For example, consider the following:

¹¹ Rhodes, *Reasoning*, pages 283-284, 291; Herbert Kern, *How to Respond: Jehovah's Witnesses*, Revised Edition (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), pages 36-37; and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pages 54-55.

Perhaps something is said in one of the Watch Tower publications that you do not grasp or that adjusts our previous understanding of matters. How do you view this? Will you allow doubts to creep in? Will confidence be replaced with skepticism? Ask yourself: ‘Where did I gain the knowledge of the Scriptures that I already have? Has not the spiritual food provided through the Watch Tower publications helped me to change my life and find contentment and satisfaction? Where else would I go?’ This is the feeling toward Jehovah’s arrangements that the disciples had toward Jesus: “Lord, whom shall we go away to? You [here including the Watchtower Society in view of the comparison made] have sayings of everlasting life.”—John 6:68.¹²

I have underlined “where” and “whom” in the above quote to show that the Watchtower Society has here disconnected its followers from looking for the person (the “whom” in John 6:68 [Jesus]) they should go to, and in his place they have put a place (the “where” underlined in the above quote) to which people should go, namely, to the Watchtower organization.

While the above is concerning, for it replaces a person who can save (Jesus) with an organization led by men who cannot save anyone, the following quotation from *The Watchtower* is more consistent with Bowman’s overall criticism, even if it does not fit with his critique of the particular *Watchtower* article (February 15, 1983) cited earlier in this section:

No matter where we may live on earth, God’s Word continues to serve as a light to our path and a lamp to our roadway as to our conduct and beliefs. (Ps. 119:105) But Jehovah God has also provided his visible organization [= the Watchtower Society], his “faithful and discreet slave” [directed by a small body of men known as the “Governing Body”], made up of spirit-anointed ones, to help Christians in all nations to understand and apply properly the Bible in their lives. Unless we are in touch with this channel of communication that God is using, we will not progress along the road to life, no matter how much Bible reading we do.—Compare Acts 8:30-40.¹³

¹² “Have You Really Come to Know God?” *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1974, page 438.

What is expressed above is not what we find taught in the New Testament (NT). For example, there is nothing, anywhere in the NT about a “channel of communication” which a person must be “in touch with” in order to “progress along the road to life.” There is only a *person*, Jesus of Nazareth, the ‘him’ that answers to the “whom” of Peter’s question to Jesus in John 6:68. It is to Jesus that God lets us come after we first “heard from the Father and ... learned” (John 6:45). The Father does just the opposite for those whom *he chooses to keep from believing* in his Son, for he dislikes them because of what they do and so he “blinded their eyes and he has made their hearts hard, that they should not see with their eyes and get the thought with their hearts and turn around and I should heal them.”—John 12:36-40.¹³

Further on this point, it is wrong for anyone who claims to follow Jesus and who claims to worship Jah God, to at the same time manipulate people’s thinking by suggesting that it does not “matter how much Bible reading we do.” Ultimately, this creates an ongoing and inappropriate dependency on the Watchtower Society for what we will not find “no matter how much Bible reading we do,” namely, “progress along the road to life.”

While the Society does teach that a living faith in Jesus is needed for salvation and that salvation is a gift which cannot be ‘earned’ (see the quote referenced in note 10, on page 501), by teaching that a person must be “in touch with [a human] channel of communication” in order to “progress along the road to life,” the Society has put loyalty to its teachings above loyalty to God and to Jesus, and to teachings based on the best available reasons.

After reviewing the earlier quotations from *The Watchtower*, what is written in the February 15, 1983, article cited by Bowman is more biblically based than it may first appear in the context of the Watchtower Society’s teachings about “salvation” as a whole. Bowman seems to be borrowing ideas from Watchtower literature in general and then attempting to create a more

¹³ “The Path of the Righteous Does Keep Getting Brighter,” *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1981, page 27, par. 4. Earlier the Watchtower Society declared that since 1919 it “has served as God’s sole collective channel for the flow of Biblical truth to men on earth” (“Staying Awake with the ‘Faithful and Discreet Slave,’” *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1960, page 439, par. 2).

¹⁴ See Chapter 7, page 476.

structured system of ‘works for salvation’ based on the “four requirements” outlined in this particular *Watchtower* article.

Concerning the first “requirement,” I do not believe the *Watchtower* is claiming what Bowman suggests. But since in a broader context Jehovah’s Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Society do teach that “one must study Watchtower literature to be saved,” Bowman could have made his point without bringing this particular article and its “four requirements” into the discussion of salvation the way he and others have done.

The ‘second requirement’ put forth in the February 15, 1983, *Watchtower* cited by Bowman is “obeying God’s laws,” meaning in this context that one accept and try to live by “the moral requirements set out in the Bible.” Bowman again misses the intent of this particular article, and of its ‘second requirement.’ Indeed, Bowman responds by writing, “While true Christians are characterized by obedience to God’s laws, such good works of obedience are not the basis of salvation.” But this *Watchtower* article does not say ‘good works of obedience are the basis for salvation,’ and even Bowman agrees true Christians would be “characterized by obedience.”

Again, the *Watchtower* article does not say you can *earn* salvation through obedience. Yet, it is also clear that in order for Jah through Jesus to save a person, a person must show faith by works to which God may then respond by giving that person life in his Son. It is *God’s choice* to give a person life because a person “fears him and works righteousness [and therefore] is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35). But it is *the person* who does the ‘fearing’ and who shows this fear by ‘working righteousness.’ While this does not *earn* a person salvation, it is clearly the basis upon which Jah through Jesus *chooses* to give life to those who love them. Compare this with Jah’s judgment against those “who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness,” according to Romans 2:1-11 (underlining added).

While obedience itself does not *earn* salvation for anyone, it can show that a person has a living faith necessary for salvation. This is made clear in part by Paul, when he writes of various acts of disobedience that, if practiced, can prevent a person from ‘inheriting God’s kingdom’ (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 [this verse, along with 1 Peter 4:3-4, is in fact cited in the February 15, 1983,

Watchtower article]). In the Bible, obedience to God indicates a person has a living faith. Indeed, after referring to the obedience Jesus himself showed while he was on the earth, Hebrews 5:9 says he “became responsible for everlasting salvation to all those obeying him” (underlining added).

This directly contradicts Bowman's claim that good works (including obedience) are “the fruit of a salvation that has already taken place (Ephesians 2:8-10)” (underlining added), which is also not taught in Ephesians 2:8-10 (cited by Bowman).¹⁵ To the contrary, the Bible teaches God gives life to a person who has a *living* faith shown by its “works.”

I will discuss Ephesians 2:8-10 and other, related NT texts further in the next section. Regarding the third requirement listed in the February 15, 1983, *Watchtower* article, this takes us back to the beginning of this chapter where I presented the Watchtower Society's belief that Christians must be “associated with God's channel, his organization.” In support of its claim, the *Watchtower* tells its readers that “God has always used an organization,” pointing to 1) the ‘organized’ group that built the ark and survived with Noah and 2) to the first-century Christian congregation, which the *Watchtower* article rightly presents (and rightly so in some sense) as a united group of evangelizers, though it fails to note that the NT Christians did *not* always agree.—John 17:22; 21:23; Acts 4:12; 15:38-39; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Galatians 2:11-14.

Bowman responds to the Society's view by noting that while believers “will associate with and love their fellow Christians,” this association is not a “prerequisite work” necessary to be saved. Jehovah's Witnesses who are Christian Witnesses of Jah agree more so with Bowman on this point than they do with the Watchtower Society, because though the Bible teaches Christians should ‘not forsake gathering together’ (Hebrews 10:25) it also makes equally clear the fact that this can be done with as few as “two or three gathered together in [Jesus'] name.”—Matthew 18:20.

¹⁵ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, pages 54-55.

In the NT, the Greek expression translated “in [the] midst” (Greek: *en meso*) in Matthew 18:20 occurs 29 times.¹⁶ In each case it has to do with someone or something that really is right in or among someone or something else. When we read in Matthew 18:20 that Jesus will be ‘right there’ with “two or three” of his followers who gather together in his name, Christians should trust that he is, in a very real and immediate sense, ‘with us.’ Any human or human organization who claims as the Watchtower Society does on page 12 of their February 15, 1983, article that “to receive everlasting life ... we must identify [the Watchtower] organization and serve God as part of it,” is not Christian.

The *Watchtower* magazine here misleads people about the importance of human organization and association. Gathering together in Jesus’ name with but “two or three” is all that is needed for Jesus to be ‘with us,’ according to the Bible. But salvation is not said to come even from this association; rather, it comes as a result of Jesus ‘searching our kidneys and our hearts’ so as to ‘give to us individually according to our deeds.’—Revelation 2:23; 20:13.

But the more Christians we have to associate with the better. If we are with Jah and with Jesus, and if we have the holy spirit, then we can accomplish their will no matter how many or how few are a part of our ‘association’ (compare 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Ephesians 2:9; 1 Peter 5:9-10). Christians can complete the “good works” which “God prepared in advance for us” because by our faith in his Son we ourselves have become “a product of his work” (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, if we “perform [the work of declaring the good news] willingly,” we will have “a reward.” Even if we do this “against [our] will,” it is still a part of the “stewardship entrusted” to us.—1 Corinthians 9:17.

Returning to the third requirement in the February 15, 1983, *Watchtower* article, it may be in this particular instance that what the *Watchtower* writes about has to do with those who *deliberately* ‘forsake gathering together’ in ways that could suggest a person has lost his or her living faith. In this light note that in the context of Hebrews 10:25 “faith” (verse 22),

¹⁶ Matt 10:16; 18:2, 20; Mr 6:47; 9:36; Lu 2:46; 8:7; 10:3; 21:21; 22:27; 22:55; 24:36; Joh 8:3; 8:9; Act 1:15; 2:22; 17:22; 27:21; 1Th 2:7; Heb 2:12; Rev 1:13; 2:1; 4:6; 5:6 (twice); 6:6; 22:2.

“confession” (verse 23), and the command to ‘gather together’ (verse 25) are followed by a salvation-related warning in verses 26 and 27 (see also verses 29 and 36).

Therefore, as it was presented in this particular *Watchtower*, the third requirement should likely be taken in the sense intended by Hebrews 10:25 in its immediate context. However, it is also true that Bowman’s analysis of the Society’s third requirement is accurate in terms of the importance the Society elsewhere associates with loyalty to itself.

The fourth requirement given for salvation in the February 15, 1983, *Watchtower* article “is connected with loyalty.” The “loyalty” referred to here is not the same that is referred to in the August 15, 2000, *Watchtower* (quoted on page 499, about ‘feeling a sense of loyalty’ to the Watchtower organization). Rather, on page 12 the February 15, 1983, *Watchtower* teaches, “God requires that prospective subjects of his Kingdom support his government by *loyally advocating his Kingdom rule to others.*”

In support of this fourth requirement, the article quotes Matthew 24:14 where Jesus speaks about the good news of the kingdom as preached throughout the earth before the “end.” Bowman’s response to this fourth requirement is, “Salvation is never made conditional on the participation in evangelism or preaching work.” Bowman acknowledges that Jesus sent forth his followers to preach and to teach, but Bowman believes the sending forth of “the twelve ... and of the seventy-two ... was specific to them, and while their commission may be used as a model it should not be imposed as a rule for all Christians.”¹⁷

One of the limitations with Bowman’s analysis here is he avoids discussing the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:19-20. Though spoken directly to his small group of followers, Jesus’ words here about ‘making disciples,’ ‘baptizing,’ and ‘teaching’ others about him, about his Father, and about the holy spirit are nowhere limited to these eleven Christians.

With the above in mind, there is nothing unbiblical or unchristian about the *Watchtower’s* fourth requirement. Further, since Jesus gave his followers this commission, and since his

¹⁷ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, page 55.

followers later wrote about salvation as a gift given to those who “obey” Jesus, it is clear why the Watchtower Society puts preaching the good news of the kingdom as a ‘requirement’ for salvation, though such obedience does not *earn* anyone salvation (Hebrews 5:9). Of course, salvation is at all times a “gift” given by Jah through Jesus to those whom he loves.—Ephesians 2:8.

Faith “Alone”

Can saving faith exist “apart from works”? According to Martin Luther’s translation of Romans 3:28, Christians are declared righteous by faith “alone” (German: *allein*).¹⁸ But in the Greek text of Romans 3:28 there is no Greek word for “alone” Paul’s words are qualified by “apart from works of law,” and so “faith” in this text is not contrasted with *all* works, but only with “works of law.” What, though, did Paul mean when he referred to “faith apart from works of law”? Are there works other than “works of law” necessary to complete before God declares a person “righteous,” and which serve as a basis for determining whether a person has a living faith necessary for salvation?

In this section I will consider what both Paul and James (two early Christians who wrote portions of the NT) had to say about faith, works, and salvation. But apart from Martin Luther’s addition of the word “alone” to the biblical text of Romans 3:28, the only time there is a reference to “faith alone” in the NT is in James 2:24. It reads (with underlining added), “You see that a man is to be declared righteous by works, and not by faith alone.” So the one biblical text which contains “faith alone” is preceded by a *negative* (“not by”). Consider, too, the biblical text most closely resembling Reformed theology’s “faith alone” doctrine, namely, Ephesians 2:8-10:

By this undeserved kindness, indeed, you have been saved through faith; and this not owing to you, it is God’s gift. No, it is not owing to works, in order that no man should have

¹⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [1910]), page 35, note 2, writes that Luther ‘inserted *allein* [“alone”] before *durch den Glauben* [German for “by faith”].’ See note 19 for more on Luther’s view of the letter of James.

ground for boasting. For we are a product of his works and were created in union with Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in them.

When Paul and James refer to that which serves as a basis for God's declaring a person righteous, it is appropriate that we understand salvation as implied by or accompanying the declaration since the Bible does not separate those who are declared righteous from those who are saved. The question here, then, has to do with whether a person can be saved or declared righteous by faith *alone* and "not owing to works," or does God, as James writes, declare a person righteous "by works, and not by faith alone"? To help answer this and related questions in this section, I will now present the teachings of James and Paul on the subjects of faith, works, and salvation.

James on "faith" and "works." It is rare indeed to find Reformed believers who embrace the concept of salvation by "faith alone" using the NT letter of James to support their views.¹⁹ It is more often the case that Reformed believers will start out with the NT letters to the Romans and to the Ephesians, and only when necessary will they present their "faith alone" position as in full agreement with what James wrote. Jehovah's Witnesses also believe that Paul and James agree with each other on the subjects of faith, works, and salvation. But do they agree, and if so what good reasons exist to show that they agree with each other?

Beginning with the letter of James, in the first two chapters he discusses "faith" and "works" extensively. For example, James refers to "various trials" that can test the quality of a person's faith, but which also result in endurance (James 1:3-4). James reemphasizes this point about endurance in 1:12, "Happy is the man that keeps on enduring [NASB, NIV: 'perseveres'] trial, because on becoming approved he will receive the crown of life."

¹⁹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, page 35, writes that Luther "disliked, most of all, the Epistle of James because he could not harmonize it with Paul's teaching on justification by faith *without* works, and he called it an epistle of straw as compared with the genuine apostolic writings."

Beginning in 1:21, James explains the importance of acting on God's commands by becoming "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). In setting up this exhortation, James refers to the importance of accepting "the implanting of the word which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). The expression, "the implanting of the word," translates the Greek τὸν ἐμφυτον λόγον (*ton emphuton logon*), with *emphuton* ("implanted") serving as an adjective modifying *logon* ("word"). The RSV translates this as, "the implanted word."

After receiving this "implanted word," Christians are to then become doers of it in order to realize its saving power. Otherwise James writes that we are simply "deceiving ourselves with false reasoning" (James 1:22). James then cites a "form of worship" that is "futile," namely, where a person does not "bridle his tongue" (James 1:26). He then writes about the importance of caring for "orphans and widows in their tribulation" and how we should keep ourselves "without spot from the world" (James 1:27). It is in the second chapter of his letter that James presents an important discussion about faith and works.

In James 2:14, two questions are asked (with underlining added): "Of what benefit is it, my brothers, if a certain one says he has faith but he does not have works? That faith cannot save him, can it?" The answers given to both of these questions are in the negative according to James 2:17, "Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself" (compare James 2:20). Here in clear, unambiguous terms we are told that a "faith" apart from "works" (notice James does *not* here refer to "works of law") "cannot save." Reformed theology is incompatible with this biblical teaching.

Next James uses Abraham as an example in making his point about the importance of works. This particular example is very significant for the present discussion, because both James and Paul (see below) use Genesis 15:6 in support of their teaching about faith and works. For now I will stay focused on James, who according to the NASB's translation of James 2:21-24 wrote:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was

perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. [Underlining added.]

In the above text the Greek word *ἔργον* (*ergon*) is used four times and it is translated "works" each time by the NASB (and by the NWT). Yet, not once does the popular NIV use "works" to translate *ergon* in James 2:21-24. Instead the NIV uses "what he did" (verse 21), "actions" (verse 22), "what he did" (verse 22), and "what he does" (verse 24) for *ergon* in this account.

Compare this with the NIV's translation of Romans 4:1-6, where Paul uses the same proof text (Genesis 15:6) which James uses in James 2:21-24, but where the NIV uses "works" both times for the Greek noun *ergon* (Romans 4:2, 6). Additionally, instead of translating the related participle *ergazomēno* as "the man who *does something*," or as "the man who is *active*" in Romans 4:4 and in Romans 4:5, the NIV uses "when a man works" and "the man who does not work," respectively.

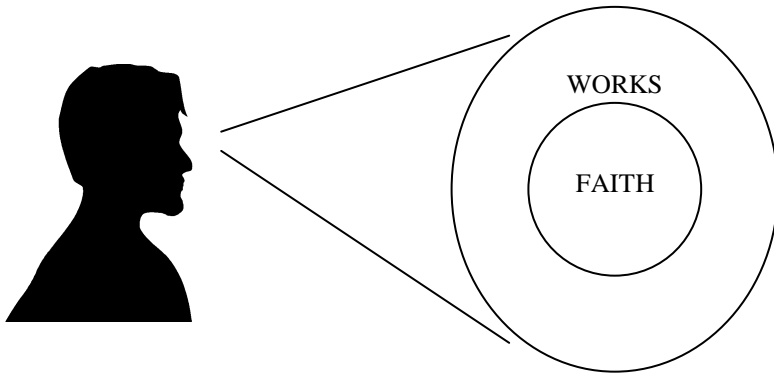
The intent of the NIV's choice of translations in these texts is clear: NIV presents a contrast between faith and works in Romans, but not in James. Yet, in both writers we find the same word, or different forms of the same or related words, and both James and Paul use the same OT proof text (Genesis 15:6) in their discussion of the same subject, namely, faith and works!

By its presentation of these accounts, the NIV conceals the correspondence and similarity of thought that can be found in both writers concerning the same proof text. The reference to Genesis 15:6 makes James' point about Abraham's 'faith working with his works' and how 'by his works his faith was perfected' (James 2:22). James then writes, "You see that a man is to be declared righteous by works, and not by faith alone."

James then uses the example of Rahab to show the importance of works, for "the harlot was declared righteous by works" (James 2:25). James teaches faith must be accompanied by works in order for it to be a living, true faith, even going so far as to write that "works" are the basis for being "declared righteous." According to James, then, "faith alone" is not enough

because “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). To better understand James’ teaching, consider figure 8.1:

Figure 8.1
James’ View of Faith and Works



The intent of this simple illustration is to show that for James “faith alone” does not equate to a living, saving faith; a person must also have works. James focuses on the works that “perfect” a person’s faith precisely because he knows works are necessary, since without them a person’s faith is “dead” (James 2:26). Here is my summary of main points from the first two chapters of James’ NT letter:

- 1) Trials faced by Christians test our faith but they also result in endurance. If we continue enduring then salvation (the “crown of life”) will be given to us (James 1:3-4, 12).
- 2) The “implanted word” is able to save those who are “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:21-25).
- 3) An outward display of “worship” is futile if a person cannot control his or her “tongue.” Jah God views works such as looking after orphans and widows and keeping “oneself without spot from the world” as a “clean and undefiled” form of worship (James 1:26-27).
- 4) “Faith alone” is *not* sufficient for a person’s justification. “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:24, 26).

- 5) 'Works alone' are not sufficient, either, because faith and works must 'work together' (Greek: συνήργει, *sunergei*) since works "perfect" (Greek: ἐτελειώθη, *eteleiothe*) a person's faith (James 2:22). Examples such as Abraham and Rahab are used to support James' view of faith and works.

James deals directly with works that reveal a living faith necessary for salvation. Without works, faith is dead. A dead faith cannot save. So works are necessary for a living, *saving* faith. Paul, on the other hand, has a slightly different presentation of faith and works than does James, though both writers are entirely consistent in their teachings about faith, works, and salvation. Having sufficiently considered what James taught, I will now turn to what Paul wrote.

Paul on "faith" and "works." The apostle Paul makes a statement early on in his letter to the Romans that is strikingly similar to James' words as recorded in James 1:21. In Romans 1:16 Paul writes: "For I am not ashamed of the goods news; it is, in fact, God's power for salvation to everyone having faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

For James the "implanted word" that is capable of saving a person is at work in one who is a "doer" of that word (compare Romans 2:13), one whose works then perfect his or her faith. For Paul the "good news" is "God's power for salvation." But what does he mean when he adds "to everyone having faith"? Are works just as essential to Paul's concept of "faith" as they are for James? Or does Paul separate faith from works so that a "faith alone" doctrine results?

The answers to these and other related questions can be found by reviewing Paul's writings, just as I did with James. Consider first the unambiguous language used by Paul in Romans 2:6-11 from the NRSV (1989 [with underlining added]):

For he will repay according to each one's deeds [RSV: "works" (a plural form of *ergon*): to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace

for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.
For God shows no partiality.

Paul clearly recognized the need for and the importance of works, since they will serve as the basis for God's judgment. But Paul, like James, also taught that a person cannot *earn* salvation. Paul outright rejects a person's attempt to gain a righteous standing before God by performing "works of law" because such an attempt will only reveal our sin, "Therefore, by works of law no flesh will be declared righteous before him, for by law is the accurate knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Paul then writes of "God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ," and of the "free gift" of being "declared righteous," and also about having "the release by ransom ... through faith in his [Jesus'] blood."—Romans 3:22, 24, 25.

For Paul, "a man is declared righteous by faith apart from works of law" (Romans 3:28). Throughout his discussion of faith and works, Paul refers to "Jew[s] ... resting upon law" (Romans 2:17) and about their being "orally instructed out of the Law"²⁰ (Romans 2:18). Paul writes about the law's "written code" (Romans 2:27, 29), which he also calls "works of law."—Romans 3:28.

Clearly, then, in his letter to the Romans Paul argues against those who seek a righteous standing before God by following the laws given to Moses. These laws are not sinful; rather, they reveal a person's sin so that those under law would know they need redemption. Since Jesus "condemned sin in the flesh," those desiring to please Jah God have been "set free from the Law" so that a righteous standing before him is no longer temporarily determined by adherence to a written code. "God's law" now has to do with a living faith in Jesus of Nazareth.—Romans 7:3, 7, 12, 16; 8:2.

A good example of how a person can be declared righteous apart from "works of law" involves Abraham. After referring to the account in Genesis 15:6 to show that Abraham was declared righteous while not under law, Paul writes that "to the man that does not work but puts faith in him who declares the ungodly one

²⁰ For an explanation of why the NWT uses "law" and "Law," see the 1984 NWT Reference Edition's footnote to Rom 3:19.

righteous, his faith is counted as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Paul goes on to explain that because of Abraham's faith Jah would fulfill his promises, because his faith "was counted to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:18-22). Yet, Abraham's "faith" was shown by his works. Paul's discussion in Romans 4:18-22 simply accepts what is true, namely, that Abraham performed works which perfected his faith (James 2:22). In this case, the works which showed Abraham's living faith involved sexual intercourse with his wife and procreating according to Jah's will.

In discussing faith and works, Paul has in mind the kind of faith that is accompanied by works, for works will serve as a basis for "God's righteous judgment" (Romans 2:5, 6). Paul rejects "works of Law" as a means of gaining a righteous standing with God, though some of such works (such as our love and worship of Jah God) can of course also show our faith in him today. But these works do not *earn* us anything. For example, under the laws of Moses Israel pursued righteousness but "did not attain" it.—Romans 9:31.

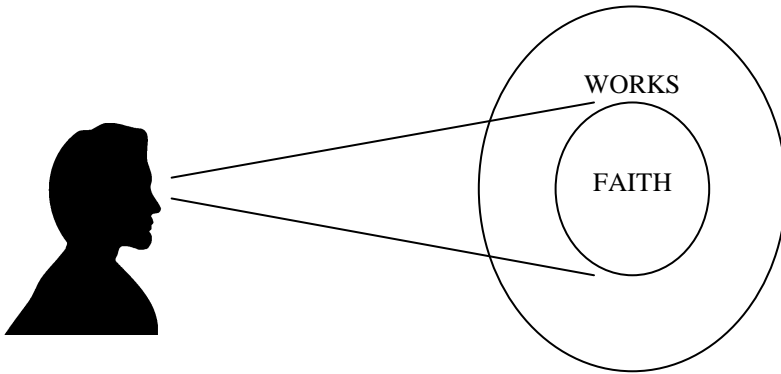
This is because as a nation they failed to put faith in the "stone of stumbling [Jesus]" and so they were rejected by God (Matthew 21:43-44; 23:37-39; Romans 9:32, 33; 1 Peter 3:8). Yet, Jah God did not reject Israel entirely (Romans 11:1, 2) and the Bible shows Jah will continue to show mercy to those Jews who put faith in his Son (Romans 11:32). But it is also by 'grafting' in those who are not fleshly Jews that "all Israel will be saved."—Romans 2:28-29; 11:17-32.

Paul further explains that for a person to be saved he or she must "publicly declare" (a form of the Greek word *homologe'o*) that "Jesus is Lord" and "exercise faith" (see below) in our hearts "that God raised him up from the dead" (Romans 10:9-10; compare Acts 2:36). The NASB, NIV, RSV and other Bible translations render *homologe'o* as "confession." The NWT uses "public declaration" to present the translators' view that this "confession" is done in the presence of others.²¹ To better

²¹ See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), page 568, which gives "declare (publicly)," "acknowledge," and "confess" (among others) as acceptable meanings for *homologe'o*. See also J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on*

understand Paul's presentation of the relationship between faith and works, consider figure 8.2:

Figure 8.2
Paul's View of Faith and Works



As with James, Paul does not view saving faith as something separate from works. But Paul also makes it abundantly clear that saving faith is not something a person gains by following a written set of rules, such as the laws of Moses. For Paul, a person's works are inseparable from faith or from disobedience (depending on the works), and so they are necessary one way or the other in order to serve as the basis for our judgement by God (Romans 2:6-11). Therefore, each time Paul refers to a person's "faith" his reference includes those works which are a part of any living faith. With all of the above in mind, I offer the following summary of Paul's teaching concerning faith and works:

- 1) There are several parallels between Paul's discussion of faith and works in Romans and James' discussion of the same subjects in his NT letter:
 - a) Both Paul and James emphasize the necessity of endurance in good works that result from faith, which ultimately lead to an approved standing before God (Roman 2:7; James 1:3-12).

- b) Paul explains that the “good news” is God’s “power for salvation,” while James similarly refers to “the word which is able to save your souls” (Romans 1:16; James 1:21).
 - c) Both Paul and James recognize that faith must be accompanied by and continue to result in good works; these works will serve as the basis for our judgment by God (Romans 2:6; James 2:14, 24).
- 2) Paul outright rejects a person’s attempt to gain a righteous standing before God by performing works of law, “Therefore, by works of law no flesh will be declared righteous before him, for by law is the accurate knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).
 - 3) Paul uses the account in Genesis 15:6 (the same account used by James) to show that “a man is to be declared righteous by works, and not by faith alone,” since Abraham was declared righteous while not under law (Romans 4:1-7; James 2:21-24).
 - 4) Though rejected as a nation for failing to accept Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 21:43-44; 23:37-39), God will continue to show mercy to Jews who put faith in his Son (Romans 11:32). But it is by the ‘grafting’ in of those who are Jews “on the inside” that “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 2:28-29; 11:17-32).
 - 5) Paul does not present a living “faith” as something “alone,” or separate from works. Rather, Paul teaches that a saving faith does not result from strict adherence to the laws of Moses. A living faith will produce fine works, and those without faith will also be judged by their works (Romans 2:6-11).

Like James, Paul teaches works will be the basis for showing whether a person has a living, *saving* faith. Paul, like James, teaches that without works faith is dead. A dead faith cannot save. Therefore, works are necessary for a living, saving faith.

Paul’s teaching on faith, works, and salvation is entirely consistent with James and with the rest of the NT. But what does the Bible teach about the fulfillment of Jah’s promise of salvation, and how does this compare with the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses? The questions will now be considered further and then answered based on the best available reasons.

Salvation—For Whom and Where?

Jah's original purpose and his "will" for "heaven" and for the "earth." In Chapter 7, I presented what I consider good biblical reasons for believing when Jah God placed the first man (Adam) in the Garden of Eden, he gave him the prospect of enjoying life throughout the earth with his children apart from death. Death "entered into the world" only *after* Adam's and Eve's sins, though Paul attributes the actual presence of sin in the world to "one man," Adam.—Romans 5:12.

Because Adam disobeyed God and ate from "the tree of the knowledge of good and bad," he not only *then* knew 'good and bad,' but by taking this knowledge Adam chose the one thing he had good reason to believe was not his to take. In so doing, Adam showed more favor for his wife and for himself than he did for Jah God.—Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-24.

But the account in Genesis Chapter 3 reveals clearly that Jah was not unprepared or unable to deal with the choices he permitted his creatures to make, choices which were not in harmony with his expressed will. According to Genesis 3:15, Jah immediately foretold a "seed" who would "bruise" the "serpent" in "the head" after the "seed" is 'bruised in the heel' by this serpent.

As I explained in Chapter 7, the promised "seed" of the "woman"²² in Genesis 3:15 is a prophetic reference to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.²³ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus has been raised to life and given "all authority in heaven and on the earth" by Jah God, his Father (Matthew 28:18). Because of this, Jehovah's Witnesses also believe that Jesus will someday bring an end to wickedness and to the "serpent" who helped bring disobedience into the world.—Revelation 12:7.

Jah is "patient" and he "does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Jah gives life to those who "turn in the opposite direction" (Isaiah 50:5) and who

²² Jehovah's Witnesses have identified the "woman" of Gen 3:15 as someone other than Eve, namely, as the heavenly "woman" of Rev 12:1-6, 13-17. For more on the Watchtower Society's view of this "woman," see *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), pages 177-180.

²³ See *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1988), page 889.

choose to continue trusting in Jesus. According to the Bible, those who are given this life will “dwell” in a “new heavens” and in a “new earth” (2 Peter 3:13). But what is so “new” about the promised “new heavens” and “new earth”?

In his model prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus asked for his Father's “will” to “take place ... also upon the earth” (verse 10). While there are many ways in which God's “will” for the earth can take place, the “new earth” clearly has a good deal to do with it. Indeed, three separate books in the Bible refer to a “new heavens” and a “new earth” (Isaiah 65:17, 22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). What kind of “new earth,” then, is the Bible talking about in these three texts?

In the Bible we read about how the heavens and the earth ‘declare God's glory’ (Psalm 19:1). The Bible also teaches “heavens” can mean a superior ruling power (Daniel 4:25, 26) and “earth” can be used for a society of people (Genesis 11:1; Psalm 96:1). Further, the Bible teaches Jah will ‘not make the earth to totter’ for he keeps it “standing forever.”—1 Chronicles 16:30; Psalm 104:5; 148:1-7; Ecclesiastes 1:4.

With the above in mind, and after examining the three biblical texts which refer to a “new heavens” and a “new earth,” while no one knows for a certainty just what Jah has in mind for the earth it is clear that the ‘newness’ of both will include the removal of sin and death. But since a new literal, physical heavens and earth were not created in the time of Isaiah or during the time when the prophecies he recorded were fulfilled, the following prophecy (given by Jah God to Isaiah) must refer to something else, “For here I am creating new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be called to mind, neither will they come up into the heart.”—Isaiah 65:17.

When the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in or around 537 BCE, they became the “new earth” that God had promised. Then governor Zerubbabel and high priest Joshua appear to have become key parts of the “new heavens,” the authority directing and supervising the Jews (Haggai 1:1, 14). This new governmental arrangement, which Jah put in place after he ‘rocked the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry ground’ by ‘rocking all the nations’ (Haggai 2:6, 7), brought joy and happiness to his people just as he promised, “For here I am creating

Jerusalem a cause for joyfulness and her people a cause for exultation.”—Isaiah 65:18.

In connection with Jah’s promises, another reference is made to a “new heavens” and a “new earth” in 2 Peter 3:13. That the reference here is similar to but different from Isaiah 65:17 can be seen in part by Peter’s reference to a “heavens” and an “earth” of old, which he further describes as “the world of [Noah’s day that] was deluged with water” (2 Peter 3:5, 6). Peter then writes that “by the same word the heavens and the earth that are now are stored up for fire and the day of judgment and of the destruction of the ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

During the flood of Noah’s day the actual planet earth was not destroyed, though the surface of the earth and the watery deep were likely significantly restructured due to the increased pressure from the ‘heavenly waters,’ and from the breaking open of the “springs of the vast watery deep” (Genesis 7:11; 8:2). None of the three physical “heavens” which existed during Noah’s time were destroyed, though it could be argued the releasing of the waters “above the expanse” involved some change to the atmosphere and to the conditions of the earth.—Genesis 1:7; 7:11.

What clearly was affected, changed, and even removed completely were all of the “ungodly men,” including leaders and governments, leaving only Noah and his family to repopulate the “new earth” after the flood waters receded (Genesis 9). Since the flood, Jah promised to “never again ... call down evil upon the ground on man’s account” (Genesis 8:21). Jah has also decreed, “for all the days the earth continues, seed sowing and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, will never cease” (Genesis 8:22). However, according to Peter the present “heavens” and “earth” are awaiting judgment by a fire “in which the heavens will pass away with a hissing noise, but the elements being intensely hot will be dissolved, and earth and the works in it will be discovered.”—2 Peter 3:10.

Revelation 21:1 contains the third and final reference to “a new heavens and a new earth” in the Bible. The context leading up to John’s vision here is very revealing. In Revelation 19 there is rejoicing in heaven over the destruction of “Babylon the Great,” who has influence “over many waters,” which waters represent “peoples and crowds and nations and tongues” (Revelation 17:1,

15). Revelation 17:2 also speaks of this “harlot’s” relationship with “the kings of the earth.” Revelation Chapter 18 records the fate of Babylon the Great, and it also tells us that those who have a relationship with her (such as the “the kings of the earth” and the “traveling merchants”) will mourn her destruction (Revelation 18:9-19). Then in Revelation 19 we read about the destruction of “kings,” “commanders,” “strong men,” and others (Revelation 19:17-21). Finally, in Revelation 20:1-3 Satan himself is seized and bound for “a thousand years.”²⁴

Immediately following these things, we read of those who will sit down on “thrones” and who receive “power of judging” after ‘coming to life to rule with the Christ for a thousand years’ (Revelation 20:4). Revelation 20:6 speaks of the ‘coming to life’ of these “witnesses” as the “first resurrection,” which makes them “priests of God and of the Christ.” The balance of Revelation Chapter 20 teaches the Devil will be released from his prison at the end of the “thousand years” and “the great and the small” will stand “before the throne” in judgment.—Revelation 20:7-12.

Notice it is only *after* the “heavens” and the “earth” “fled away,” as “no place was found for them” (verse 11), that John then sees a vision of a “new heavens” and “new earth.” This is followed by a vision of the “city,” the “city” which replaces “the great city” of “Babylon the Great.”—Revelation 17:18; 18:10, 21; compare Revelation 11:8.

“New Jerusalem.” Revelation 21:9 refers to “the Lamb’s wife,” who is further described in glorious detail throughout Revelation Chapter 21, starting in verse 9, though also referred to at the beginning of Chapter 21. With reference to the first reference, Bowman argues that since “the new Jerusalem will come ‘down out of heaven’ (v. 2), it obviously will be on the earth.” Bowman then quotes Revelation 21:3 and writes, “Note that this is not saying that a select number will go to heaven to live with God, but that God will come to live with humanity.”²⁵

²⁴ Regarding Satan, it should be kept in mind that the Bible refers to him as “the ruler of this world” (Joh 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), as “the ruler of the authority of the air” (Eph 2:2), as “the god of this system” (2Co 4:4), as the one under whose power the world exists (1Jo 5:19), and as the one to whom the authority of “all the kingdoms of the inhabited earth” (Lu 4:5-6) has been given.

²⁵ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, page 56.

There are several problems with Bowman's observations here. First, Revelation 21:2 does *not* say that New Jerusalem will "come down," as Bowman writes (with underlining added). Rather, in both Revelation 21:2 and 21:10 John writes about the holy city "coming [Greek: present participle form of *katabaino*] down out of heaven from God" (underlining added).

Depending on any contextual qualifiers for the verbal sense of *katabaino*, it could suggest a continuous extension of heavenly Jerusalem to the earth.²⁶ The precise sense of this "coming down" must be understood in the light of the kind of "city" that is in view, of course. With this in mind, I believe the following rightly captures some of the more outstanding features of this "city":

That the New Jerusalem is indeed a heavenly city is further supported by the vision of her that John beheld. Only a symbolic city could have the dimensions and splendor of New Jerusalem. Its base was foursquare, about 555 km (345 mi) on each side, or about 2,220 km (1,379 mi) completely around, that is, 12,000 furlongs. Being a cube, the city was also as high as it was long and wide. No man-made city could ever reach that far into "outer space." Round about was a wall 144 cubits (64 m; 210 ft) high. The wall, itself constructed of jasper, in turn rested on 12 foundation stones, precious stones of great beauty—jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, hyacinth, and amethyst. On these 12 foundation stones were engraved the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. The city proper within these beautiful walls was no less glorious, for it was described as "pure gold like clear glass," having a broad way of "pure gold, as transparent glass."—Re 21:12-21.²⁷

²⁶ Even if we understand John's use of *katabaino* as "come down," this does not of itself necessarily indicate that this heavenly "city" actually takes up territory here on the earth, or in the "new earth." For example, in Gen 11:5 the LXX uses *katebe* in reference to God's inspection of the city and of the tower mankind had built. But there is nothing else in the text or in its context which indicates Jah actually descended in a material form to see what was taking place. He could have, but the expression 'came down' could also mean (because of God's nature as a spirit [Joh 4:24]) Jah in some sense turned his attention to what was happening in this particular area of the post-flood world.

²⁷ *Insight on the Scriptures*, vol. 2, page 497.

Though the above appears to assume the “new earth” and its heavenly reach will be the same as the present planet and its heavenly atmosphere, the main point is there are good reasons for understanding “New Jerusalem” as a heavenly city which is “coming down out of heaven from God” in a sense which does not involve the literal, physical presence of a giant “city” on this earth or in the “new earth.” At the very least, the evidence from the Bible suggests the “new heavens” involves new leadership and guidance for the “new earth,” by God and the “Lamb” through “New Jerusalem.”—Revelation 21:3.

Revelation 22:3 also tells us “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it [= the city], and his slaves will render him sacred service.” Revelation 22:4-5 says these “will see his face,” that they have “his name on their foreheads,” and that they “will rule as kings forever and ever.” Later in this chapter I will discuss what it means to “rule as kings” in a Christian sense, as part of God’s kingdom. But note in Revelation 14:1-4 those who belong to the Lamb are again described as having “his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads.” These are said to be with the Lamb “standing upon the Mount Zion,” which the writer of the book of Hebrews refers to as “a city of [the] living God, heavenly Jerusalem.”—Hebrews 12:22 (underlining added).

Further supporting the heavenly nature of “New Jerusalem” is the description of this “city” in Revelation 21:18-21, where the city is described using a variety of precious stones and metals similar to the description of Jah’s great spiritual chariot (Ezekiel 1:16, 26; 10:9 [note the references to “chrysolite” and to “sapphire”]). It is also similar to the Edenic cherub in Ezekiel 28:13 (compare Daniel 10:6). Revelation 4:3, 6 uses “jasper” and “sardius” to describe God’s appearance (compare Revelation 21:11) and the “glassy sea like crystal” which is “before the throne” is similar to the “river of water of life, clear as crystal,” which flows from “the throne of God and of the lamb” which is in New Jerusalem.—Revelation 22:1, 3.

Of course, the fact that “the heavens are God’s throne and the earth is his footstool” (Isaiah 66:1) also supports the view that the location of his throne will not be on the earth itself. In view of the spiritual description of the “heavenly” city, it is easy to see how “coming down out of heaven from God” may involve the

start of his new relationship with “mankind” by means of New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:4). However it is, God will be “with” us in the “new heavens” and in the “new earth.” Jah and “the Lamb” will be the “temple” of New Jerusalem, “the nations will walk by means of its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.”—Revelation 21:22-24.

The “great crowd ... standing before the throne.” As part of his vision of the “new heavens” and the “new earth,” John describes a “New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:2). In the previous sub-section I presented reasons from the Bible showing that “New Jerusalem” is a “heavenly city” through which God will “dwell” with “mankind.” By means of this “city,” the glory of God and light from “the Lamb” will guide “the nations” as they bring ‘their glory and their honor into New Jerusalem’ (Revelation 21:22-26; compare Isaiah 60:3). But the precise identity of these “nations” is an area of dispute between Jehovah’s Witnesses and others.

Earlier in the book of Revelation, specifically in Chapter 7 verses 9-17, John refers to a “great crowd” which comes “out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues.” This “great crowd” has several striking similarities with the “mankind” of Revelation 21:3. For example, in Revelation 7:15-17 we read that God will “spread his tent over” the “great crowd,” which leads to the elimination of hunger and “any scorching heat,” and to God ‘wiping out every tear from the eyes’ of the “great crowd.”

This is similar to Revelation 21:3-4, where the “tent of God” is again presented and where God is again described as removing “every tear from their eyes,” with “death,” “mourning,” ‘outcrying,’ and “pain” said to be “no more.” In both Revelation Chapters 7 and 21 God blesses “mankind,” though in Revelation 21 it is clear that Jah God does this through “New Jerusalem,” which is “coming down out of heaven” from him.

Still, not everyone believes the “great crowd” of Revelation Chapter 7 is a reference to the “mankind” of Revelation Chapter 21. Many believe the “great crowd” which John saw “before the throne of God” (Greek: ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ, *enopion tou thronou tou theou*) is actually in heaven, in God’s “temple” (Greek: *na'os*) serving “him day and night” (Revelation 7:15). Indeed, it could be argued that being “before the throne of God”

involves being in the heavenly presence of God, even as it appears to mean in Revelation 4:6, 10, 8:3, and 14:3. But the Greek word translated “before” in all of these texts (*enopion*) does not always mean the one(s) “before” the throne or “before” God are literally in his heavenly presence. That is why Paul wrote to Timothy, “In the presence [*enopion*] of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor, doing nothing from partiality.”—1 Timothy 5:21, RSV.

Clearly, Paul was not *in heaven* in the presence “of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels” when he wrote the last words in the above paragraph. But he was ‘in their sight’ because he was *observable* by them, even though Paul himself was on the earth. This is consistent with Psalm 11:4, which tells us Jah “is in his holy temple ... in the heavens is his throne ... [and] his own beaming eyes examine the sons of men” (see 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 14:2; 113:5-6; Matthew 23:22). Further, 1 Timothy 6:13, Galatians 1:20, and 2 Corinthians 4:2 all use *enopion* to describe what is done *on the earth*, but “in the sight of” God.²⁸

Bowman is one scholar and Witness critic who believes the “great crowd” of Revelation 7:9 is in the heavens before God’s throne. Bowman believes this “great crowd” is the same “great crowd” of Revelation 19:1, which is explicitly described as “in heaven.” Bowman gives four reasons for identifying these two ‘great crowds’ as the same: 1) “these are the only places in Revelation where the expression ‘the great crowd’ is used”; 2) “both crowds shout in a loud voice”; 3) “both begin their cry in the same way”; and 4) “the elders and the four living creatures” react the same way, using the same opening word, “Amen.”²⁹ I will now review and respond to each of Bowman’s four reasons:

- 1) ***“These are the only places in Revelation where the expression ‘the great crowd’ is used.”*** Bowman begins the first point under his “b” section (from which the above four points are taken) with reference to both Revelation 7:9-17 and 19:1. But after he presents these two texts Bowman

²⁸ This same use of *enopion* for “in the sight of” can also be found in the LXX of Ex 22:8, 9; 23:15 and 17.

²⁹ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, pages 56-57.

writes, “Both describe a ‘great crowd’ (7:9; 19:1, 6).” Yet, if you look at Bowman’s parenthetical references there are three passages referenced, not two. Bowman throws in Revelation 19:6 even though he is supposedly considering only “two passages.” So why include the “great crowd” of 19:6 in a discussion of the ‘great crowds’ of Revelation 7:9-17 and 19:1? The reason appears to be because if Bowman cannot identify the “great crowd” of Revelation 19:1 with the “great crowd” of 19:6, then there is at least one other “great crowd” which must be identified. This is true even if the ‘great crowds’ of Revelation 7:9 and 19:1 are the same. This alone could be used to show that (in the book of Revelation) the “great crowd” can have more than one meaning. So we must carefully review each reference.

I do not believe there are any parallels between the “great crowd” of Revelation 19:6 and the ‘great crowds’ of Revelation 7:9 and 19:1. They are not the same in terms of the “loud voice” that is described (see Bowman’s point #2 [discussed below]); they do not “begin their cry in the same way” (see Bowman’s point #3 [discussed below]); and the elders and the four living creatures do not react the same way in each text (see Bowman’s point #4 [discussed below]). John appears to be presenting a series of different groups all of whom “Praise Jah!” for his judgment on “Babylon the Great.” This presentation of groups, each of whom praise Jah in turn, suggests the “great crowd” of Revelation 19:1 is *not* the same “great crowd” of 19:6.

- 2) **“Both crowds shout in a loud voice.”** In Revelation 7:10 a form of the Greek verb κράζω (*krazo*, “cry aloud”) characterizes the manner in which the “great crowd” speaks. But this verb is not used in Revelation 19:1. Additionally, the adjective “loud” (a form of *megas*, meaning “great”) modifies “voice” (φωνή, *phone*) twenty times in Revelation. After examining these uses it is clear to me that no one individual or group is presented as unique in terms of having his/their voice so described. If we set aside the two examples in Revelation 7:10 and 19:1, *megas* modifies Jesus’ *phone* (“voice”) in 1:10, an angel’s voice in 5:2, 7:2, 10:3, 14:7, 9, 15, 18, and in 19:17, as well as multiple angels, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders in 5:12, and even

the 'slaughtered souls' under the altar in 6:10, an "eagle" in 8:13, an unidentified heavenly being in 11:12, 12:10, 16:1, 17, 21:3, and finally a group of unidentified heavenly beings in 11:15. If Revelation 7:10 and 19:1 were the only two places where this expression was used, then Bowman might have had a reason to consider further, namely, a uniquely identifying characteristic or feature of the "great crowd." But as it turns out, the feature Bowman cites ('shouting in a loud voice') is not so exclusive after all.

- 3) ***"Both begin their cry in the same way."*** The fact is, while there are similarities between what is said by the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 and 19:1, there are also significant differences which are not cited or discussed by Bowman. For example, only in Revelation 7:10 do we find reference to a "cry." Yet, Bowman uses "cry" in reference to both texts, which implies that the same verb is used in each text though it is not. Only one text (7:10) uses a form of *krazo*, which means to "cry aloud." Other striking dissimilarities between the 'cries' of each "great crowd" can be seen in the following comparison of each text in Greek, followed by the English translation of the NASB:

Revelation 7:10:

Ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ
 "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Revelation 19:1:

Ἀλληλουϊά ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν
 "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God."

The only similarity between what is said by each "great crowd" is when they speak of "salvation." The differences include the fact that in 7:10 the words are spoken to "God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (underlining added), but in 19:10 it is God *alone* whom the "great crowd" addresses. Also, they do not "begin their cry in same way," as Bowman claims. The "great crowd" in 19:1 begins with the Greek word *allelouia*, which is a combination of the two Greek words *allelou* ("praise") and *Ia* ("Jah"), which are themselves transliterations (reproductions of sounds from one language into another language) of the Hebrew words

הללו (halelu ["praise"]) and יה (Yah ["Jah"]).³⁰ Therefore, the "great crowd" of Revelation 19:1 'begins' its cry with, "Praise Jah!" The "great crowd" in 7:10 does not.

Still another difference in the way the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 and 19:1 begin speaking is while "glory" and "power" are a part of the expression in 19:1, they are not included in what is said by the "great crowd" in 7:10. Finally, there is a difference in the grammatical case used for "God" which may indicate a different sense for how each "great crowd" speaks about "salvation" in reference to God. The NASB attempts to communicate this by using "belong to" in Revelation 19:1 (where the genitive case for "God" is used), but not in 7:10 (where the dative case for "God" is used). The genitive case for "God" is also used in Revelation 12:10, which is more similar to 19:1 than it is to 7:10 in terms of the things which are attributed to God.

- 4) ***"The elders and the four living creatures" react the same way, using the same opening word, "Amen."*** Regarding the reaction of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, in Revelation 7:9 the "great crowd" which is taken "out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues" is "standing before [Greek: *enopion*] the throne and before the Lamb." After this "great crowd" cries out to God in verse 10, verse 11 refers to the "angels standing *around* [Greek: *kyklo*, used as an adverb meaning they stood 'in a circle' or 'round about'] the throne and the elders and the four living creatures." Obviously, from what is written here the "great crowd" of Revelation 7 does not include the angels, the twenty-four elders, or the four living creatures! But after the great crowd of 19:1-3 finishes speaking it is only the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fall down and worship God; the angels are not mentioned! What this means is the angels could very well be "great crowd" of Revelation 19:1-3. Indeed, in Revelation 5:12 it is the angels (along with the "four living creatures" and the "twenty-four elders") who are referred to as "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (compare Hebrews 12:22). Surely this constitutes a "great crowd" in heaven which could be presented in

³⁰ See Chapter 1, pages 95-100, for more on the meaning and use of "Hallelujah."

Revelation 19:1-3 as praising Jah for his judgment against Babylon the Great.—Compare Revelation 16:5-6.³¹

Also, the action of falling down and worshiping God after praise and thanksgiving are offered to him is not something done only *after* the ‘great crowds’ of Revelation 7:10 and 19:1-3 finish speaking. Rather, it is something the twenty-four elders do “*whenever* the living creatures offer glory and honor and thanksgiving to the one seated on the throne” (Revelation 4:9-11; compare 11:15-17). As for the use of “Amen” in the opening words of 7:12 and 19:4, Bowman is only telling half of the story. What he does not mention is only in Revelation 7:12 does “Amen” begin *and end* the worshipful address to God. If the use of “Amen” at the beginning of each statement to God is as significant as Bowman suggests, then why does he not see a similar significance *in the difference* in meaning for the use of the same word *at the end* of each expression? “Amen” is also used as the opening (and as the only!) word of the four living creatures in 5:14, in a context in which praise is given to both God and the Lamb, as in Revelation 7:10.

After reviewing Bowman’s reasons for identifying the “great crowd” of Revelation 7 with the “great crowd” of Revelation 19:1-3, 6, I reject his conclusions. Further, Bowman has failed to adequately treat the parallels and the differences between these and other Bible accounts.

As I noted earlier, Revelation 7:9-17 refers to God’s “tent” as “spread over” those who come out of the “great tribulation,” people who come from all earthly ‘nations, tribes, peoples and tongues.’ Later in Revelation 21:3 there is another reference to “the tent of God” as “with mankind.” The presence of this “tent” is not the only similarity between the two accounts. The *effects* of the “tent” are also the same, for in Revelation 7 and in 21 we

³¹ In the Watchtower publication *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!* the “great crowd” of Rev 19:1 is called a “heavenly chorus” (page 272). In its *Reasoning from the Scriptures* book (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), page 168, the Watchtower Society considers both the “great crowd” of 19:1 and 19:6 to be “angels.”

read, “God will wipe our every tear from their eyes.”—Revelation 7:17; 21:4.³²

Jah’s Promises

Hebrews 11 and the “promises” to “men of old.” Some believe that in Hebrews Chapter 11 there are good reasons for believing faithful men and women of old (such as Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Noah, Enoch and others) were looking forward to a future life in the “new heavens,” *not* to a future life in the “new earth.” If this is true, then teaching as do Jehovah’s Witnesses that these biblical figures “will soon be resurrected to life in the earthly domain of the ‘city’ God made ready for them”³³ should be reconsidered, or left open to more than one interpretation based on good reasons.

Jehovah’s Witnesses read what is written in the Bible about the “new heavens” and about the “new earth,” as well as what is written about those who will live in each. We believe the Bible teaches some resurrected people will be with “the Lamb standing upon the Mount Zion” (which is “heavenly Jerusalem” and “New Jerusalem,” as explained in the previous sub-section), and there will be those over whom God will “spread his tent,” namely, “mankind” (Revelation 14:1; 21:1-4). The Bible is also clear that “in these” (a plural reference showing that the “new heavens” is *not* identical to the “new earth”) “righteousness is to dwell.”—2 Peter 3:13.

While these beliefs are based on good reasons, the Christian Witnesses of Jah do not put forth positions about things such as whether Solomon will be resurrected,³⁴ or whether Jah will bring to life any of his faithful servants of old to live in heaven or on earth with him. The answers to these questions belong to Jah, and to Jesus, to whom the Father has given “authority to do judging”

³² Even Bowman recognizes this connection (Bowman, *Jehovah’s Witnesses*, page 52, section C.1.a.[3]), though he does not identify the “mankind” of Rev 21:3 as the “great crowd” of Rev 7:9.

³³ “Respond to God’s Promises by Exercising Faith,” *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1993, page 17, par. 20.

³⁴ See, for example, the “Questions from Readers” published in *The Watchtower*, July 15, 2005, page 31.

(John 5:27). But in several issues of *The Watchtower* the Society has told those loyal to it Hebrews 11:13-16 applies only to those faithful men and women spoken of by name in Hebrews Chapter 11. Yet, how can this be harmonized with Hebrews 11:10, where it is said (with my underlining added) that OT faithful ones hoped “for a better place, that is, one belonging to heaven”?

Consider Hebrews 11:13-16 and 11:39-40 according to the NWT:

Hebrews 11:13-16

In faith all these died, although they did not get the [fulfillment of the] promises, but they saw them afar off and welcomed them and publicly declared that they were strangers and temporary residents in the land. For those who say such things give evidence that they are earnestly seeking a place of their own. And yet, if they had indeed kept remembering that [place] from which they had gone forth, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they are reaching out for a better [place], that is, one belonging to heaven. Hence God is not ashamed of them, to be called upon as their God, for he has made a city ready for them.

Hebrews 11:39-40

And yet all these, although they had witness borne to them through their faith, did not get the [fulfillment of the] promise, as God foresaw something better for us, in order that they might not be made perfect apart from us.

In the Second Edition of this book (published in 2000, on pages 532-534 [under this same sub-heading]), I offered several arguments in support of the view published by the Watchtower Society. The Society separates the “strangers and temporary residents” from the OT (referred to in Hebrews 11:13) from “the temporary residents scattered about” according to 1 Peter 1:1.

This distinction could be further described as separating the faithful OT men and women who ‘saw the promises afar off’ from faithful ones alive during the time of the writing of Hebrews, and who were “reaching out for a better [place] ... belonging to heaven.” According to Jehovah's Witnesses, the latter group will live in the “new earth” and the former group will

dwell in the “new heavens.” While Jehovah’s Witnesses who are Christian Witnesses of Jah and Jehovah’s Witnesses who are loyal to the Watchtower Society both agree there will be a “new heavens” and a “new earth” in which “righteousness is to dwell” (2 Peter 3:13), the Christian Witnesses of Jah leave it to Jah and to his Son to determine *who* will live *when* and *where*.

Yet, we do teach that there are *both* a “new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise.” We believe there to be an indication here and there in the Bible about who may live where, but why over-think what is God’s to decide for each person? Instead we should cite the biblical teaching and hope and proclaim “there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous” (Acts 24:15), leave the rest to Jah and to Jesus, and then spend our time as Christians helping those in need and bearing witness to what is true for good reasons.

However, where there exists a controversy concerning what is true, details are essential. So while some controversies may be unfortunate, Christians should not avoid discussing details about our beliefs when necessary. (I trust this book shows some evidence so far of that!). With this in mind I will here consider the best available reasons for understanding what the author of Hebrews 11 teaches concerning the Christian hope, and the hope of men and women of ancient times.³⁵ Speaking of those who had faith, the author of Hebrews references “Abraham” as “an alien in the land of the promise” (Hebrews 11:9), and also his sons Isaac and Jacob as “heirs with him of the very same promise” (Hebrews 11:9). But what is this “promise”?

Recall that Jah God told Jacob: “I am Jehovah the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land upon which you are lying, to you I am going to give it and to your seed” (Genesis 28:13). However, more was needed in order to truly possess this “land,” namely, “the city having real foundations, the builder and maker of which [city] is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Therefore, Abraham’s hope was to ‘possess the land’ of promise that is spoken about in texts such as Psalm 37:29, and so for

³⁵ The balance of this section is based in large part on my written response to the question, “How do you reconcile the belief in an earthly paradise for believers with the teaching of Hebrews 11:13-16 and 11:39-40?” in “*Upon the Lampstand*” (February 25, 2007 [rev. May 4, 2008]), pages 1-6, available online at <http://www.elihubooks.com>.

Abraham to truly attain it he would have to wait for a 'city built by God.' In the NT, the Christian hope described in Hebrews 11 and elsewhere is *to have chosen ones actually become* "the city having real foundations," in a spiritual, heavenly and physical manner. Consider:

Ephesians 2:19-22

Certainly, therefore, YOU are no longer strangers and alien residents, but YOU are fellow citizens of the holy ones and are members of the household of God, and YOU have been built up upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, while Christ Jesus himself is the foundation cornerstone. In union with him the whole building, being harmoniously joined together, is growing into a holy temple for Jehovah. In union with him YOU, too, are being built up together into a place for God to inhabit by spirit.

It is difficult to determine whether the best available reasons support the belief that the "apostles and prophets" mentioned here include OT "prophets," or if the reference is to "apostles" and "prophets" of 1 Corinthians 12:28. But the teaching that the apostles and other Christians sealed by God and by Jesus Christ will in some special way become the "city" is clearly based on the best available evidence, namely, in this case, that of Jesus:

Revelation 3:12

"The one that conquers—I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will by no means go out [from it] anymore, and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which descends out of heaven from my God, and that new name of mine."

Note Jesus says the 'one that conquers will by no means go out' from "the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which descends out of heaven." Note the extended description of New Jerusalem given here:

Revelation 21:9-14

And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls which were full of the seven last plagues, and he spoke

with me and said: “Come here, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” So he carried me away in [the power of the] spirit to a great and lofty mountain, and he showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God and having the glory of God. Its radiance was like a most precious stone, as a jasper stone shining crystal-clear. It had a great and lofty wall and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names were inscribed which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. On the east were three gates, and on the north three gates, and on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. The wall of the city also had twelve foundation stones, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The above shows clearly that “the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” is “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.” Exactly what this “coming down out of heaven” means is not so clear, as I explained earlier in this chapter, though it is apparent that “heavenly Jerusalem ... and the congregation of the firstborn ... have been enrolled in the heavens” (Hebrews 12:22-23). This appears to involve the governance by Jesus and by his “bride” over the earth which he promised would be theirs.—Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 4:8; Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:9-10.

Again, these ones will “*by no means go out*” from “*the city* ... which descends out of heaven” (Revelation 3:12). Their governance “over the earth” (Revelation 5:10) in direct relation to New Jerusalem’s “coming down out of heaven” is further described this way:

Revelation 21:1-4

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea is no more. I saw also the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God and prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. With that I heard a loud voice from the throne say: “Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.”

The descending of this “holy city” appears clearly to signal that “the tent of God is with mankind” (Revelation 21:3). But if *all* “mankind” who are redeemed by God are with him and with his Son in heaven *before* New Jerusalem descends, and if all of “mankind” are also this “holy city,” then how does its descent cause God to be “with mankind” anymore than he already would be according to this belief?

To be clear, my point is that unless there are humans *on* the earth who are *not* the same ones who ‘conquer and who will by no means go out’ from New Jerusalem “which descends out of heaven” (Revelation 3:12), then there is no new sense in which God is “with mankind” as a result of New Jerusalem’s ‘descent.’ Jehovah’s Witnesses believe there *is* a new sense in which Jah God is going to be “with mankind,” namely, by means of New Jerusalem which is a part of the “new heavens” and “new earth” Jah is ‘making new.’—Revelation 21:5.

Finally on this point, Revelation 22:1-2 describes “a river of water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its [= New Jerusalem’s] broad way.” On each side of this river are “trees of life ... And the leaves of the trees [are] for the curing of the nations.” The Lamb’s “bride” which descends from God does not need any more ‘curing,’ for “no falsehood was found in their mouths; they are without blemish” (Revelation 14:5). But those to whom New Jerusalem descends (“mankind”) will need “curing” as is clear from the effects which result from New Jerusalem’s descent.—Revelation 21:4.

“Kings over the earth.” In the Bible book of Daniel, an interpretation of a dream by Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar tells of the transfer of power from one kingdom to another, until finally God himself sets up “a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin” (Daniel 2:36-44). The book of Daniel also describes “someone like a son of man” who receives a kingdom from one called “the Ancient of Days.” Consider Daniel 7:13-14:

I kept on beholding in the visions of the night, and, see there! with the clouds of the heavens someone like a son of man happened to be coming; and to the Ancient of Days he gained

access, and they brought him up close even before that One. And to him there were given rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him. His rulership is an indefinitely lasting rulership that will not pass away, and his kingdom one that will not be brought to ruin.

Daniel goes on to write about how this “son of man” would not be the only one who rules in this kingdom. Indeed, according to Daniel 7:27 the “one like a son of man” will have others rule with him (with underlining added):

And the kingdom and the rulership and the grandeur of the kingdoms under all the heavens were given to the people who are the holy ones of the Supreme One. Their kingdom is an indefinitely lasting kingdom, and all the rulerships will serve and obey even them.³⁶

When Jesus was on the earth, he spoke directly to those whom he considered “holy ones,” like those whom Daniel mentions. In John 14:2-3 Jesus said, “In the house of my Father there are many abodes.” He also said he would “prepare a place” for his followers, so that where Jesus is ‘they may be also.’ This “place,” according to Jesus, is ‘at his table in his kingdom.’

This includes ‘sitting on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel’ (Luke 22:28-30). Paul had this hope in mind when he wrote to Timothy, “If we go on enduring, we shall also rule together as

³⁶ Some translations read, “His kingdom [will be] an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (NASB [underlining added]). The NIV reads similarly. But the RSV and the NEB (and others) agree with the NWT. The use of the third-person singular pronoun (“His,” “Him”) rather than the plural reference (“their,” “them”) is due to the ambiguity of the antecedent for *malkhuteh* (“his/its kingdom”). It can refer to the “people” or to the “Supreme One.” The NWT and other translations view *am* (“people”) as the antecedent, which is singular and masculine and the central constituent of the construct chain “the people of holy (ones) of the most high.” Because reference to a “people” includes individuals, a corresponding reference in English may either use “they” or “it” (compare the 1984 NWT Reference Bible’s footnote to Dan 7:27). It appears there is a parallel between Dan 7:14 and 7:27, for in 7:14 the one to whom the kingdom is given is also the one whom the people serve. In the first part of 7:27 the “people” (= “holy ones”) are given the kingdom, and then the “rulerships” serve *them*. See, T.J. Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison* (JSOTSup 198; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pages 212-213 for more on the parallels between 7:14 and 7:27, and pages 232-233 for more on the ambiguity of the antecedent in verse 27. Meadowcroft believes it is “more likely that the third person singular in vs. 27 refers to the people of the saints.”

kings” (2 Timothy 2:12, see also 1 Corinthians 4:8). Further, in Revelation 2:26-29 the glorified Jesus says to his followers in Thyatira (with underlining added):

And to him that conquers and observes my deeds down to the end I will give authority over the nations, and he shall shepherd the people with an iron rod so that they will be broken to pieces like clay vessels, the same as I have received from my Father, and I will give him the morning star. Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations.

For those who are faithful to Jesus “down to the end,” he will give “authority over the nations.” Because this is possible only as a result of Jesus’ great sacrifice, the inhabitants of heaven sing this song of praise and thanksgiving to the “Lamb,” “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slaughtered and with your blood you bought persons for God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10; underlining added). However, Bowman objects to the translation “over the earth” in the NWT in this text:

The NWT rendering “over the earth” has almost no scholarly support and is certainly wrong. The word *epi* on occasion can mean “over” (e.g., Rev. 9:11; 11:6), but it never means “over” when used with a place-noun such as “the earth.” The phrase *epi tēs gēs*, “on the earth,” appears 63 times in the New Testament, yet Revelation 5:10 is the *only* place anyone has ever suggested that it be translated “over the earth.” In the immediate context, the phrase *epi tēs gēs* appears two other times (vv. 3, 13), where it must be translated “on the earth.”³⁷

Bowman makes several mistakes in the above paragraph, and his analysis leaves out significant information that contradicts his claims about the NWT’s translation of Revelation 5:10. First, Bowman claims the expression *epi tes ges* “appears 63 times in the New Testament.” But it actually occurs 57 times in the NT, not 63

³⁷ Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, page 56, section D.1.a.(2).

times.³⁸ Second, Bowman claims *epi* “never means ‘over’ when used with a place-noun such as ‘the earth.’” This appears to be an instance where Bowman speaks ahead of a complete and proper analysis, for there is nothing unusual with understanding *epi tes ges* in Acts 10:11 as “over the earth,” a translation which can be found in at least one modern translation of the NT.³⁹

Also, Bowman does not seem accept that it is the particular verb associated with *epi tes ges* in Revelation 5:10 which in large part supports the translation “over” for *epi*. In fact, Revelation 5:10 is the *only* place in the NT where *epi tes ges* is used with the verb *basileuo* (“to rule”). Indeed, the four other times in the NT where *basileuo* is used with *epi* (Luke 1:33; 19:14, 27; Romans 5:14) the translation “over” is appropriate, while “on” does not fit the overall sense of these passages. Even from a strictly lexical perspective, that is, without regard for the verb with which *epi* is associated, more than one Greek lexicon recognizes “over” as a proper sense for the Greek preposition *epi*.⁴⁰

Though *epi* can be used for that which rests “on” something, in Revelation 5:10 it appears to be used metaphorically with *tes ges* (“the earth”) and with *basileuo* to show control or authority “over” the place or people referenced. It is used in a similar sense elsewhere in the NT with other, similar verbs. Consider Luke 12:42, where we read that Jesus will “appoint” faithful servants “over his body of attendants” (Greek: ἐπὶ τῆς θεραπέας αὐτοῦ, *epi tes therapeias autou*). Surely, no one will argue that the “faithful slave” is here appointed to stand “on” the master’s “attendants”! Rather, the Master will give his faithful slaves authority *over* his belongings.

³⁸ This determination was made by using the search feature for the exact phrase *epi tes ges* using BibleWorks™ (Norfolk, VA), version 6.0.005y (2003). The Westcott and Hort Greek text, used by the Watchtower Society’s NT translation, contains the phrase 57 times.

³⁹ *The Unvarnished New Testament*, translated by Andy Gaus (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ For examples see *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., page 286, “*over* of power, authority, control of or over someone or someth[ing] ... Rv 5:10”; Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), page, 231, “used of things, affairs, persons, which one is set over, over which he exercises power ... Rev. v. 10” (underlining added).

Consider also Revelation 9:11, to which Bowman himself refers, which speaks of a “king” that is “over” the “locusts” who are released from the abyss (Greek: ἐχουσιν ἐπ αὐτῶν βασιλέα, *ekhousin epi auton basilea*). This does not appear to be a literal instance of the “king” actually standing “on” the “locusts”! It seems to me that the better sense, based on the reasons provided, is this “king” has authority *over* the “locusts.”

Finally, there is the use of *epi* in Acts 8:27 which again has to do with authority “over” something, in this case the Ethiopian eunuch’s authority “over” the “treasure” of “Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.” It is similar with Revelation 5:10. Here Jesus and those who are ruling with him do so *over* the earth in that they, as “kings,” have authority “over” the earth and its inhabitants. C.B. Williams translates this part of Revelation 5:10 as, “and they will rule over the earth.”⁴¹ Jesus tells these ones, and all those who will live “with” him and with his Father in the “new heavens” and “new earth,” that they must first ‘conquer’ (see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). But ‘conquer’ who or what, and how?

Exercising Faith. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe for a person to be saved from death he or she must endure in “work that is good,” until the “end” of the person’s life or until the end of the final “age” of this world (Matthew 24:13; Romans 2:6; James 1:2-3). Paul taught (with underlining) that God “made known to us the sacred secret of his will,” and the Ephesians put their hope in Jesus “after [they] heard the word of truth, the good news about [their] salvation” (Ephesians 1:9, 13). Paul also wrote, “By means of him also, after you believed, you were sealed with the promised holy spirit, which is a token in advance of our inheritance, for the purpose of releasing by a ransom [God’s] own possession, to his glorious praise.”—Ephesians 1:13-14.

It is clear, then, while it is God who ‘makes known to us the sacred secret of his will,’ *we* must individually ‘hear the word of truth.’ *After* we believe we are then “sealed” with the holy spirit, as a “token in advance of our inheritance.” But there is another

⁴¹ See also “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, June 15, 1960, pages 383-384; “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1974, pages 735-736.

sense in which a person is “sealed,” namely, with finality through death. That is why in Revelation 6:9-11 we read about “the number” of those who were “slaughtered” because of “the word of God and because of the witness work that they used to have.” This “number” is also said to be “filled” when those still alive are “killed,” as those already “underneath the altar” were killed.

Then after some descriptive detail about the conditions of the earth, Revelation 7 presents the “number of those sealed,” namely, “a hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel.” After these are “sealed,” John sees “a great crowd, which no man was able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues.”—Revelation 7:1-9.

Having already considered the relationship between those described in Revelation Chapter 7 and the “new heavens” and the “new earth” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4), I will conclude this chapter by presenting what the Bible teaches concerning how a person can ‘conquer and inherit these things’ by “exercising faith” (Revelation 21:7). The NWT uses “exercising faith” as a translation for the Greek verb *pisteu’o* (“believe”) throughout the NT. Jehovah’s Witnesses view “faith” as something to “exercise” or show regularly by their works until “becoming approved” (James 1:12). But not everyone agrees with Jehovah’s Witnesses’ view of “faith,” or with the NWT’s translation of *pisteu’o* as “exercising faith.”

Bowman refers to “exercising faith” in the NWT as an “attempt to obscure” the truth about faith in Jesus because he believes, “to exercise faith implies more than to believe” in a Christian sense.⁴² Yet, neither in Bowman’s 1991 *Understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses* nor in his 1995 *Jehovah’s Witnesses* Zondervan booklet does he provide an analysis of the different grammatical constructions in the NT which use the verb *pisteu’o*. Bowman simply objects to NWT’s translation (“exercising faith”) and to its perceived implication of “doing works on the basis of one’s belief.”⁴³

⁴² Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses: Why They Read the Bible the Way They Do* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), pages 69-70.

⁴³ Bowman, *Understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses*, page 70. On page 53 of his *Jehovah’s Witnesses* booklet Bowman writes that “it is faith, not ‘exercising faith’ by doing good works, that is the condition of salvation.” Yet, as I have shown in this

Bowman writes, “[G]enuine faith results in good works.” But he then repeats the familiar yet inaccurate claim that “faith alone” is “the condition laid down in Scripture for God’s declaring the sinner righteous.”⁴⁴ On pages 509-518 I presented some of the good reasons for the belief that “faith alone,” apart from any works, *cannot* save. The Bible teaches us “faith without works is dead,” and a dead faith “cannot save” but a person’s works can perfect our faith (James 2:14, 22, 26). In Christian belief it is this ‘perfected faith’ which can save us.

With this in mind, I will now conclude this chapter by showing that the NWT’s use of “exercising faith” for *pistueo* is legitimate and that Bowman’s claims concerning it are false. I will also show further that the Greek verb for “believe” (*pistueo*), as it is used in the NT, involves more than mere “belief,” “faith,” or “trust” *alone*, that is, apart from works.

Back in 1990 *The Watchtower* magazine published a question from one of its readers regarding the translation of *pistueo*. The reader wanted to know why the NWT sometimes translates this verb as “exercise [or put] faith in.” In answering this question, *The Watchtower* referred to “the different shades of meaning that are expressed by the Greek word *pistueo*,” as well as to the importance of the context in recognizing different shades of meaning. Specifically, *The Watchtower* referred to the NWT’s translation of *pistueo* where it is used with different Greek prepositions. Consider:

If *pistueo* is followed merely by a noun in the dative case, the *New World Translation* usually renders it simply as “believe”—unless the context indicates something different. (Matthew 21:25, 32; but see Romans 4:3) If *pistueo* is followed by the word *epi*, “on,” it is generally rendered “believe on.” (Matthew 27:42; Acts 16:31) If it is followed by *eis*, “to,” it is usually translated “exercise faith in.”—John 12:36; 14:1.⁴⁵

chapter, *there is no such thing as a saving faith apart from works* (James 2:14). So to speak of or to embrace “faith” as something that exists apart from works is to speak of and to embrace a “dead” faith which “cannot save.”—James 2:14, 22, 24, 26.

⁴⁴ Bowman, *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses*, page 70.

⁴⁵ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1990, page 30. Bowman shows no awareness of this article in his 1991 book *Understanding Jehovah's*

The Watchtower then quotes from a Greek grammar by Paul Kaufman, which says in part, “Faith is thought of as an activity, as something men do.” Earlier in this chapter, on pages 514-518, I explained how Paul views *saving* faith, namely, as *living* faith. Paul is in complete agreement with James on the subject of saving faith. Paul and James simply emphasize different aspects of the same whole, namely, “faith” (compare figures 8.1 and 8.2, above).

This issue of *The Watchtower* also makes specific reference to the use of *pisteu’o* and to the Greek preposition *eis* (“into”), followed by an object in the accusative grammatical case, as a basis for the NWT’s “exercise faith.” But are these good reasons for its translation?

In the NT *pisteu’o* plus *eis* occurs 48 times.⁴⁶ Of these 48, 35 are found in the Gospel of John. Commenting on the use of *pisteu’o* followed by an accusative, Gerald Hawthorne writes:

Faith to John was not static or passive, but was dynamic and active, reaching out to appropriate and make the object of faith one’s own. There was in it, too, an element of dependency, a recognition of the absolute need for the object, with a consequent willingness to come to that object. It appears, also, to be more than mere belief about or recognition of the true value of an object, more than mental apprehension of it. There seems also to have been a definite concept of committal to that object—that one step beyond perception. This idea is further developed in the preposition characteristic of John’s favorite construction—the preposition εἰς [*eis*].⁴⁷

Witnesses, even though he does refer to Watchtower literature as late as May and July 1990 (see pages 145 and 146 of *Understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses*, notes 10 and 16). He also refers to a 1991 book published by Hugh Ross (see Bowman, *Understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses*, page 148, note 10). Even if Bowman did not have the information from the December 1, 1990, *Watchtower* quoted prior to the release of his *Understanding* book, that would still not explain why did he not address the arguments in the 1990 *Watchtower* in his 1995 *Jehovah’s Witnesses* booklet.

⁴⁶ See the listing of occurrences in John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward W. Goodrick, and James A. Swanson, *The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), page 800.

⁴⁷ Gerald F. Hawthorne, “The Concept of Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” *Bsac* 116 (April-June 1959), page 122.

While the *pisteu' o+eis* construction may account for the use of “exercise faith” in John’s Gospel, it is clear the NWT Committee does not depend entirely on this construction for their use of “exercise faith” throughout the NT, but on a concept of faith that is not “dead” and that is grounded in activity.⁴⁸—James 2:22, 24, 26.

“Exercise faith” captures the particular dynamic that appears to be associated with the *pisteu' o+eis* construction, and it also works well for various instances of *pisteu' o* which appear to convey an active sense based on the word’s context and use. *The Watchtower* answers the question about “exercising faith” by providing the following guide for the NWT translators concerning the meaning of *pistue' o* in the NT:

Often, the different shades of meaning of *pi-steu' o* must be discerned from the context. At times, though, different grammatical constructions help us to see what the writer had in mind. For example, if *pi-steu' o* is followed merely by a noun in the dative case, the *New World Translation* usually renders it simply as “believe”—unless the context indicates something different. (Matthew 21:25, 32; but see Romans 4:3.) If *pi-steu' o* is followed by the word *e-pi'*, “on,” it is generally rendered “believe on.” (Matthew 27:42; Acts 16:31) If it is followed by *eis*, “to,” it is usually translated “exercise faith in.”—John 12:36; 14:1.⁴⁹

NWT’s use of “exercising faith” is based on good reasons, and it is consistent with the concept of “faith” articulated in John’s Gospel, as well as throughout the Bible.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Of the 28 times “exercise faith” is used in the NWT, 17 are found in John’s writings. Each instance where “exercise faith” is found in the NWT’s translation of John it is used to render the *pisteu' o+eis* construction. But a check of the remaining 11 uses of “exercise faith” in the NWT shows that in these instances it does not translate the *pisteu' o+eis* construction.

⁴⁹ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1990, page 30.

⁵⁰ See also my more recent article, “*Pistis*,” *Watching the Ministry* (May 27, 2010), available through <http://www.elihubooks.com>.

Chapter Summary

The Bible does not teach that a person can *earn* his or her salvation, and neither do Jehovah's Witnesses who are Christian Witnesses of Jah. However, those "Jehovah's Witnesses" who remain loyal to the Watchtower Society as if they are "the voice of God,"⁵¹ have a problem: The Watchtower Society has consistently published information which encourages dependence on it for the purpose of having others "work in support of them for their own eternal salvation" (as quoted on page 499 of this chapter).

Where it concerns a person's salvation, the February 15, 1983, *Watchtower* teaches that a person must: 1) know God and Jesus "by studying the Bible"; 2) obey God's laws by conforming one's life to the moral requirements set out in the Bible"; 3) "*be associated with God's channel, his organization*"; and 4) loyally 'tell others about God's Kingdom.' In several important ways the Watchtower Society has complicated these "four requirements," primarily by inserting itself into a place and a position which others must recognize and accept, or risk committing "spiritual suicide" (see page 498). In writing, teaching, and encouraging such things the Watchtower Society and those loyal to it, in spite of the best available reasons, 'show by their works' they are not *Jehovah's* Witnesses. If by our works we show we are followers of men, then we are witnesses *of men*.

Jehovah's Witnesses who are Christian Witnesses of Jah do not 'work in support of any man or woman for our salvation.' Salvation comes from the Father through the Son, for those who trust in them because of what is true for good reasons (John 14:6). For good reasons we believe Jesus of Nazareth was a real person, the Messiah from God, who came to the earth and who "gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from the present wicked system of things according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever" (Galatians 1:4-5). Receiving this gift has nothing to do with trusting in men, for in our view "there is no salvation in anyone else, for there is not another name under heaven that has been given among men

⁵¹ "Overseers of Jehovah's People," *The Watchtower*, June 15, 1957, page 370, par. 7.

by which we must get saved,” one who is now ‘not (hu)man.’—Acts 4:12; Galatians 1:10-13; 1 Corinthians 15:45; Hebrews 5:9.

The Protestant view of “faith alone” is not based on good reasons. It also contradicts what the Bible teaches about faith or trust in God, namely, “that a man is to be declared righteous by works, and not by faith alone” (James 2:24 [underlining added]). Indeed, faith without works “cannot save” (James 2:14; compare Romans 1:16; 2:6-11; 10:9-10). This is the biblical teaching about the gift of salvation from God, which is given to those whose faith in him can be shown by works, though our works do not earn us the life that is (and that was) God’s alone to give.—Roman 2:6-11; James 1:3-12; 2:14, 24.



Abortion, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Uses of Blood, and Personal Interests

This book is a defense against many claims made by scholars and critics of Jehovah's Witnesses, claims which I believe are unjustified in many respects and at times even grossly unfair and misleading. In this book, I have endeavored to address what I consider some of the more important and some of the more controversial subjects concerning the beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses. I have also drawn a clear distinction between those who *call* themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses," and those who show by their works they are witnesses of the biblical God Jah, apart from the commands and unbiblical traditions of men.—Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:3, 6; James 2:18-23.

Jehovah's Witnesses who are Christian Witnesses of Jah look to the best available reasons for our beliefs. But sometimes there are beliefs and practices for which there is either no clear indication about what to believe or what to practice, or there may be equally good reasons available for competing beliefs, with little or no clear indication about which belief or practice is to be preferred.

Where this is the case, it does not mean we cannot credibly choose between differing beliefs, or even accept both as equally possible; it simply makes such chosen beliefs or practices *less sure*. This, then, should be the resulting belief, namely, that we accept the subject or answer is unclear or that there is more than one interpretation based on equally good reasons. Indeed, as long as the fundamental objectives of loving and, in our case, 'praising Jah with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind,' as well as

'helping others as we would ourselves are not compromised by what we believe or by what we practice,' then along with many other religions or non-religious or spiritual views, Christianity should be considered and, in fact, it should be extremely inclusive.—Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; Romans 14; Colossians 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

Still, there are beliefs and practices which can be shown to have good reasons with other competing beliefs lacking equally good or even any good reasons, and possibly even being contradicted by the other belief's good reasons. In spite of the fact that we all would likely agree that we have or desire beliefs and practices that have good reasons, there remain today disagreements about many issues and answers to questions about what is right, and what is wrong, what is immoral and what is moral, what we may believe is right, but what we recognize is the right of all men and women in this world to choose.

Since there are differing views on important personal and social issues, we must work at learning about and understanding as practically as possible the beliefs and practices of others. Then we can know better how these relate to what we otherwise have come to believe and practice, so that if nothing else we may, "If possible, as far as it depends upon [us], [we are] peaceable with all men."—Romans 12:18.

Some important issues and questions that I will discuss in this chapter involve abortion, sexual conduct, a person's sexual orientation, the use of blood, and other personal interests. For the benefit of Jehovah's Witnesses and for those who want to know more about what we believe the Bible teaches, I will address each subject to the extent that it is warranted in this book. That is why the section on "Uses of Blood" is the largest in this chapter, due to the history and the issues involved in the Watchtower Society's teachings concerning uses of blood and of its component and fraction parts.

Abortion

In April, 2007, I published several questions regarding abortion along with good reasons from the Bible which I believe

answer some important questions related to the abortion debate.¹ In this sub-section I will re-present these questions along with my answers, revised and expanded in part, with appropriate modifications to style, grammar, and content for presentation in this chapter:

Question #1: *Do Jehovah's Witnesses support laws that would prohibit a woman from having an abortion under any circumstance?*

In the “new earth” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1) which “will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea” (Isaiah 11:9), there will not be a circumstance in which a person will be subject to any questions related to abortion, ‘because pain and death will be no more.’—Revelation 21:4 (underlining added).

In the present world, where “man dominates man [and woman] to his injury” (Genesis 3:16; Ecclesiastes 8:9), and where “the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19), there will be times when choices people make may result in an unwanted pregnancy. There are also times when a woman is forcibly made pregnant with the child of a person with whom she did not intend to have sexual relations, not to mention a child. So what is a person to do if he or she wants to please God but finds him- or herself in either of these circumstances?

When abortions happen today there are good reasons for believing that Jah God is saddened greatly at the loss of a life that if left to grow will (more likely than not) become a human person, whom we believe to be made in God's image (Genesis 1:27; 9:6). Jehovah's Witnesses who are Christian Witnesses of Jah teach what the Bible teaches about the life of an unborn human (see the answer to the next question on this subject), and then we leave the matter to each Christian to decide before God and Jesus “individually,” for they are the only ones truly capable of fully understanding all of the decisions any of us have had to make in this life.—Revelation 2:23; 22:12.

¹ See my answers to “Abortion Questions,” in “*Upon the Lampstand*” (April 7, 2007 [rev. May 4, 2008]), pages 1-5, available online through the Elihu Books web site (<http://www.elihubooks.com>).

Question #2: *Do Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Bible clearly teaches that an abortion of an unborn fetus is wrong, and if not then shouldn't an abortion be a matter of conscience?*

Whether any circumstance in this world justifies an occasion where a person should have an abortion and thereby keep a living, human organism from growing into a person with rights and liberties is ultimately between that person and Jah God. Jehovah's Witnesses believe for good reasons that the Bible teaches us ways to live in the present world that will help us enjoy life and be happy. When it comes to abortion, here is what the Bible teaches according to the NWT:

Exodus 23:25-26

And YOU must serve Jehovah YOUR God, and he will certainly bless your bread and your water; and I shall indeed turn malady away from your midst. Neither a woman suffering an abortion [Hebrew: *shachol* or *shachal*] nor a barren woman will exist in your land.

Though “abortion” often refers to the voluntary termination by a mother of the life of her unborn fetus, it can also refer to unintentional miscarriages, which appears to be the meaning of the term in the above text from Exodus. I will consider this and other, similar texts below since they reveal how Jah views the death of an unborn child, which is why they are relevant when answering questions related to intentional abortion (at least in terms of the consequences, namely, the loss of the unborn child's life). If the above text does indeed refer to the death of an unborn child, then it clearly puts such an “abortion” in a negative light because it would *not* be an indication of Jah's blessing.

Job 21:10-11

His own bull actually impregnates, and it does not waste semen; his cow brings forth and suffers no abortion [Hebrew: *shachol* or *shachal*]. They keep sending out their young boys just like a flock, and their own male children go skipping about.

Here Job compares his state with “the wicked” who are in this case blessed with ‘cows that do not suffer abortion.’ Job then parallels this with their ‘sending out young boys just like a flock,’ that is, rather than die or be aborted. Here “abortion” of the unborn is contrasted with the ‘bringing forth’ of young bulls, and with the “sending out” of “children.” One is viewed positively and one is viewed negatively, apparently because life comes forth when there is no abortion or miscarriage.

Just *how* negatively such abortions are to be viewed here or how Jah views them in all possible circumstances, is not clear (but see the final question and answer in this sub-section). Yet, clearly, one (birth) is desirable while the others (abortion or miscarriage) are not desirable from Job’s perspective.—Compare Genesis 31:38; Psalm 144:14.

Exodus 21:22, 23

In case men should struggle with each other and they really hurt a pregnant woman and her children do come out but no fatal accident occurs, he is to have damages imposed upon him without fail according to what the owner of the woman may lay upon him; and he must give it through the justices. But if a fatal accident should occur, then you must give soul for soul.

While the above account does not for a certainty refer to the child that comes out prematurely as the “fatal accident,” events related to the premature ‘release’ of a child from a mother’s womb is again put into a negative light. In the light of the above texts, some of which appear to touch on the subject of the death of an unborn child (primarily through miscarriage), the following appear to be reasonable, biblical positions based on the best available evidence:

- 1) There is no biblical basis upon which Christians can teach that abortion under any circumstance is something God looks upon favorably. The death of an unborn child through abortion or miscarriage is also contrary to what we know about how Jah views the life of an unborn child from biblical texts such as those quoted above.

- 2) There is evidence from the Bible which shows that in certain instances Jah God views the death of an unborn child negatively.
- 3) It is not the responsibility of any Christian to go around trying to create laws that prevent abortions from occurring under any circumstance. Christians can and should support whatever laws are in harmony with God's laws, and certainly if abortions are illegal then Christians should abide by such laws. But where a person who has become pregnant under various conditions faces questions involving abortion, each individual must decide for him- or herself what to do when faced with a question about the life of an unborn child in this world.

At the same time, Christians do not have to endorse or otherwise support any form of an act (abortion) that involves the termination of the life of a fetus which, if left alone, will grow into a mature man or woman in God's image (see Genesis 1:26-27). Christian Witnesses of Jah teach these things because of the biblical texts cited above.

However, we accept and encourage individual accountability before God and Jesus for the choices we make, that is, so long as a person does not practice or attempt to justify what can be shown for good reasons to be contradictory to Jah God's will for unborn children. Yet, not every decision made concerning the life of an unborn child is an easy one to make, as the final question in this section reveals.

Question #3: *Is abortion "less wrong" when it involves cases of incest, rape, or mistakes made through artificial insemination than when a person aborts a child conceived through consensual sexual intercourse?*

If the "wrong" in view here is the abortion of the unborn child, then it is not "less wrong" no matter how the child was conceived. However, when a woman conceives a child through forced sexual intercourse (rape), then people today tend to be more understanding of the mother's dilemma, because of the circumstances involved, though the life of the child is still an

innocent one. But a mother's thinking and desire for a child born from unwanted sex can be very complicated.

People often consider the morality of abortion relative to the belief about whether a fetus is a "person." Unless "person" can be assigned to the unborn fetus, then some believe it can be aborted no matter what the reason. Others believe the fetus is a "person" at the moment of conception, because it begins to grow according to the genetic code which results from the combination of the male sperm and the female egg.

If left alone, the unborn child will (more than likely) grow into a human person outside of the mother's womb. As I noted earlier, some believe there are circumstances such as rape which may morally permit the rape victim to justify an abortion because the child was not *wanted*. So the basis for some of the differing views about abortion can relate to *the mother's circumstances*, not simply to whether the fetus is an actual "person" before birth.

After considering the good reasons for one position or another, I look at questions having to do with abortion apart from the question of the "personhood" of the fetus (that is, whether the fetus is a "person" at the time the abortion is considered). Rather, for good reasons I consider a fetus to be a living being without having to define it as a "person" (though without denying that it is a "person"). However, if allowed to live the fetus will grow and become a mature human person with rights given to him or her in the part of the world in which he or she is born, that is, to the extent to which human rights are there granted.

Therefore, the primary question for me as it relates to abortion issues is whether it is ever permissible to deny a living, human fetus *the opportunity* to grow into a mature human person. In the second question presented above, I presented what I learned from the Bible about the life of the unborn. After considering the best available evidence, I do not have good reasons to further answer questions about abortion issues than what I have here provided.

Further, as a Christian Witness of Jah I hope to give people good reasons for beliefs, but also to empower others "individually" to decide "inward questionings," for that is how we shall all also be judged, "not in comparison with the other person."—Galatians 6:4; Revelation 2:23; 20:13.

Sex

Life exists. It is all around us. Life *is*, in some sense, us. We are alive. We can also die. Our body can have many complete proteins but be decomposing because something is gone, or missing, or not living. The best available reasons show life can only come from life, or from what is manipulated by something already living (such as by a scientist in a laboratory). Indeed, no evidence exists to show something dead can come to life apart from something already living. But this also means there must *always* have been something or someone alive because, again, we are living now.

Some life is intelligent, as we humans define “intelligence,” while other life is *not* intelligent, that is, the way we consider something intelligent in comparison to something living but unintelligent (such as, a tree). The Bible teaches there is an eternal, intelligent life, a personal being, who gave life to life and that this personal and intelligent life at times in our history has had the name “Jah,” or “Jehovah,” both forms of the God’s name in English.—Psalm 150:6; Revelation 4:11; 19:1, 3, 4, 6.²

Jah is the intelligent life who gave life to the life existing all around us now, in the past, and in the future. The Bible tells us after Jah made “Woman” man’s attraction for her was so strong he would “leave his father and his mother” because he and “his wife” would “become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Under Edenic conditions Adam and Eve were told, “Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth.”—Genesis 1:28.

But before they could fulfill this divine mandate Adam and Eve disobeyed Jah for no good reason. So Jah rightly adjusted his will for them by removing them from the garden they were to “cultivate” and “take care of” (Genesis 2:15). Jah also punished them in other ways according to Genesis 3:16.

Subsequently, “Adam had intercourse with Eve his wife and she became pregnant [and she said]: ‘I have produced a man with the aid of Jehovah’” (Genesis 4:1). At this time, Jah had not put

² See Chapter 1, pages 1-61, for more on the use of “Jah,” “Jehovah,” and other Anglicized and other forms of the biblical God’s name. For more on intentionally intelligent, eternal life, see note 1 of the Introduction to this book, page xiii.

forth any laws about sex, and during this same time when humans were removed from God's original blessings and protection, it is clear humans were able to have sexual relations even with close relatives, but for the purpose of producing children. After Cain killed his brother out of jealousy, Jah punished him (Genesis 4:8-16). Then Cain "had intercourse with his wife and she became pregnant and gave birth to E'noch" (Genesis 4:17). So according to the first chapters of Genesis Jah made man and woman to 'stick together as one,' and to "fill the earth" with their children.

After Adam and Eve's sin, the conditions of the earth got progressively worse until "men started to grow in numbers on the surface of the ground and daughters were born to them, then the sons of the [true] God began to notice the daughters of men, that they were good-looking; and they went taking wives for themselves, namely, all whom they chose" (Genesis 6:1-2). Because of this 'attraction' to the "daughters of men," even angels themselves "did not keep their original position but forsook their own proper dwelling place" (Jude 6). Therefore, attraction left unrestrained can lead to disaster for any of us, including angels. But how can Jehovah's Witnesses today enjoy sex according to our evident design and purpose, and according to what we learn through nature?

Though there was a time early in the history of humankind when Jah permitted his followers to marry and to have more than one wife, when Jesus came to the earth to teach God's will he reiterated what Jah said in Genesis 2:24: "Jesus said to them: '... However, from [the] beginning of creation '[Jah] made them male and female. On this account a man will leave his father and mother, and the two will be one flesh'; so that they are no longer two, but one flesh'" (Mark 10:5-8). There is nothing taught in the NT about Christians marrying more than one person, at one time. In fact, being a "husband of one wife" is in the NT part of what makes a person "free from accusation" (Titus 1:6).

Further, there are no principles given anywhere in the NT for persons with more than one wife, or with more than one husband, and there are no supportive or encouraging provisions anywhere in the Bible for marriages or sexual unions between members of the same sex (which I will discuss further in the next section). Therefore, I will focus here exclusively on how Jehovah's

Witnesses can enjoy sex according to the Bible, without being manipulated or misinformed by those who “teach commands of men as doctrine.”—Matthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13.

Though it may seem a bit unusual to present a discussion about “sex” in an ‘answer scholars and critics’ of Jehovah’s Witnesses, it should be remembered there are at least two groups today who outwardly claim to be Witnesses of the biblical God Jehovah/Jah. When it comes to sex, many Witnesses who are still loyal to the men who govern the Watchtower Society and to its agencies have been (and many still are) confused about what the Bible teaches concerning sex.

According to the answer the Society provided to one question about sexual relationships back in 1978, the Watchtower Society admits at one time it had authorized “congregational elders to investigate and act in a judicial capacity regarding [sexual] practices in the conjugal relationship.”³ But in many ways the Society has gone too far in ‘investigating’ people’s private lives, and it has done a very poor job of dealing with different sexual practices relative to what the Bible teaches. Consider what else the Watchtower published in response to its reader’s questions (see note 3 for the questions) about sex and the Bible:

It must be acknowledged that the Bible does not give any specific rules or limitations as regards the manner in which husband and wife engage in sexual relations. ... The most forceful counsel in the Scriptures is that we should have complete love for God and love for our neighbor as ourselves; a husband is to love his wife as he does his own body and to cherish her and assign her honor. (Matt. 22:37-40; Eph. 5:25-31; 1 Pet. 3:7) As the apostle states, love “does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests, does not become provoked.” (1 Cor. 13:4, 5) This would certainly preclude the forcing upon one’s marriage mate unusual practices that the mate considers distasteful or even repugnant and perverted. Beyond these basic guidelines the Scriptures do

³ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1978, page 30. The questions asked were: 1) “Does the Bible set forth any specific definitions as to what is moral or immoral as regards the sexual relationship between husband and wife?” 2) “Is it the responsibility of congregational elders to endeavor to exercise control among congregation members in these intimate marital matters?”

not go and, hence, we cannot do more than counsel in harmony with what the Bible does say. In the past some comments have appeared in this magazine in connection with certain unusual sex practices, such as oral sex, within marriage and these were equated with gross sexual immorality. On this basis the conclusion was reached that those engaging in such sex practices were subject to disfellowshipping if unrepentant.⁴

I will stop here to highlight the fact that, while the Society is clearly preparing for a ‘softening’ of its prior position on certain “sex practices, such as oral sex,” to this point the Society and its leaders “equated” such things with “gross sexual immorality.” Indeed, they would even ‘disfellowship’ or excommunicate those who were “unrepentant” about “sex practices, such as oral sex.”

Yet, there is no biblical basis for the Society’s practices, at least not where it concerns oral sex between married persons. Oral sex, like with various types of kissing and sexual practice in general, should be between married persons and Jah God; practicing it should have nothing to do with others who are not a part of the marriage.

Fortunately, to some extent the answer given to the reader’s questions in the February 15, 1978, issue of *The Watchtower* suggests that after it had abused its authority and its position in investigating married people’s sexual practices, the Society did finally reach a biblical position:

A careful further weighing of this matter, however, convinces us that, in view of the absence of clear Scriptural instruction, these are matters for which the married couple themselves must bear the responsibility before God and that these marital intimacies do not come within the province of the congregational elders to attempt to control nor to take disfellowshipping action with such matters as the sole basis. Of course, if any person chooses to approach an elder for counsel he or she may do so and the elder can consider Scriptural principles with such a one, acting as a shepherd but not attempting to, in effect, “police” the marital life of the one inquiring.⁵

⁴ “Questions from Readers,” February 15, 1978, page 30 (underlining added).

⁵ “Questions from Readers,” February 15, 1978, pages 30-31 (underlining added).

It is unfortunate the Society ever permitted and encouraged such unscriptural practices in the first place. *The Watchtower* continued its answer with the following:

This should not be taken as a condoning of all the various sexual practices that people engage in, for that is by no means the case. It simply expresses a keen sense of responsibility to let the Scriptures rule and to refrain from taking a dogmatic stand where the evidence does not seem to provide sufficient basis. It also expresses confidence in the desire of Jehovah's people as a whole to do all things as unto him and to reflect his splendid qualities in all their affairs. It expresses a willingness to leave the judgment of such intimate marital matters in the hands of Jehovah God and his Son, who have the wisdom and knowledge of all circumstances necessary to render the right decisions.⁶

The above position is more biblical than the Society's prior position on sexual practices including oral sex, in that it is more balanced and less rigidly based on men's traditions (compare Isaiah 29:13). Indeed, if the Watchtower Society would adopt the view expressed in the above paragraph and "refrain from taking a dogmatic stand where the evidence does not seem to provide sufficient basis" for some of its other teachings (such as the use of blood, which I will discuss at the end of this chapter), then the Society may not have had to deal with so many changes to its policies, policies which are often not based on the best available "evidence."⁷

Returning to the 1978 "Questions from Readers," consider what else *The Watchtower* had to say about sexual desires:

By his reference to "sexual appetite" [in Colossians 3:5] the apostle certainly is not condemning the normal sexual desire that finds proper outlet and expression within the marriage arrangement. We have a normal appetite for food and drink and can properly satisfy it. But one can become a glutton or a

⁶ "Questions from Readers," February 15, 1978, page 31.

⁷ For more on issues having to do with the Watchtower Society's authority, and the means by which it establishes and maintains its position and place among Jehovah's Witnesses, see the First and Second Dissertations in *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002).

drunkard by self-indulgent and unrestrained eating and drinking. So, too, one could get so preoccupied with sex that satisfying sexual desire becomes paramount and the chief aim in itself, rather than an adjunct or subordinate complement to the expressing of love that the Bible urges.⁸

The above counsel is fine, for no Christian should become so consumed with “satisfying sexual desire” that it “becomes paramount ... rather than an adjunct or subordinate complement to the expressing of love that the Bible urges.” But the Society does not explain how, according to the Bible, certain sex practices (such as oral sex) are inappropriate as a “proper outlet and expression within the marriage arrangement.” It appears the Society is putting its own view of sex within marriage above what can be shown to reasonably be true, from the Bible.

While there are known sexual practices that can be shown to be unclean for good reasons (see next sub-section), kissing different areas of the human body for stimulus and for pleasure leading up to sex is nowhere in the Bible said to “violate what is holy” (compare 1 Timothy 4:7). Indeed, if Solomon teaches us anything in the Song of Solomon (and he teaches us *lots* of things!), it is this: There are many ways in which we can ‘rejoice with the wife or husband of our youth.’—Proverbs 5:18-19.

The only time the Watchtower Society attempts to give good reasons for its position that oral sex is not “clean,” is in its explanation of the Greek word *pornei’a* in another issue of *The Watchtower* (considered below). But note the Society’s continued explanation from *The Watchtower*, in a footnote to its February 15, 1978, “Questions from Readers”:

Whatever guidance [the NT] provides as regards sex practices within marriage, therefore, is indirect and must be viewed as only of a persuasive but not a conclusive nature, that is, not the basis for setting up hard and fast standards for judgment. At the same time there is the possibility and perhaps a likelihood that some sex practices now engaged in by husband and wife were originally practiced only by homosexuals. If this should be the case, then certainly this would give these practices at least an unsavory origin. So the matter is not one to be lightly

⁸ “Questions from Readers,” February 15, 1978, page 31.

dismissed by the conscientious Christian simply because no direct reference to married persons appears in the aforementioned texts.⁹

The Society does not here even explain clearly just what "some sex practices" are under consideration. The other problem is the Society does not provide any evidence for its claim that "some" (and so, more than *one*) sex practices were "originally practiced only by homosexuals." *The Watchtower* here leads people to believe such evidence exists, though it does not provide anything further for its readers to consider in connection with its claim on this point. This lack of clarity and resulting confusion about sex practices has at times led to severe frustrations within Watchtower marriages, even if the Society through its elders is no longer 'policing' married Christians' bedrooms.

As I mentioned earlier, in another issue of *The Watchtower* the Society presented a question and its answer having to do with the meaning of the Greek word *pornei'a*. In its answer the Society wrote in part, "the term 'fornication' is *por-nei'a*, which designates all forms of immoral sexual relations, perversions and lewd practices such as might be carried on in a house of prostitution, including oral and anal copulation."¹⁰ Then in 1976, two years before the 1978 "Questions from Readers" considered earlier, the Society published the following:

Unnatural practices in connection with sex in marriage, such as oral and anal copulation, have caused some of God's people to become impure in his eyes. But *The Watchtower* kept above this morass of filth by alerting married couples to God's thinking on the matter. Also, fornication (*por-nei'a*, Greek), which is so detestable in God's sight, was shown to include all forms of immoral sex relations. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10)¹¹

Part of the 'alert' the Society gave in earlier issues of *The Watchtower* included definitions of *pornei'a* from several Greek

⁹ "Questions from Readers," February 15, 1978, page 31 (underlining added).

¹⁰ "Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, November 15, 1974, page 704.

¹¹ "You Must Be Holy Because Jehovah Is Holy," *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1976, page 123, par. 15.

lexical sources. For example, consider the following from *The Watchtower* of 1972:

A thorough study of the matter shows that *por-nei'a* refers to *all forms of immoral sexual relations*. It is a broad term, somewhat like the word “pornography,” which is drawn from *por-nei'a* or the related verb *por-neu'o*. Lexicons of the Greek language clearly show this to be so. They show that *por-nei'a* comes from a root word meaning “to sell,” and it describes sex relations that are licentious and not restrained (as by the restraint of adherence to marriage bonds). Thus, of the use of the word in Bible times, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* states that *por-nei'a* described “illicit sexual intercourse in general.” Moulton and Milligan's *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* says it is “unlawful sexual intercourse generally.” The sixth volume of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says that *por-nei'a* can come to mean “‘sexual intercourse’ in gen[eral] without more precise definition.”¹²

Not one of the sources cited in the above quote from *The Watchtower* identifies oral sex between married persons as an example of *pornei'a*. That is no doubt part of the reason the Watchtower Society changed its unscriptural position and perhaps also why the questions given in the February 15, 1978, “Questions from Readers” are not dogmatic concerning what it calls “certain unusual sex practices, such as oral sex, within marriage.”

Though the 1978 answer to this question is more reasonable than the prior position (which included investigating and excommunicating Christians who did not agree with the Society's views on sexual practices within marriage), the Society still assumes too much when it classifies oral sex as “unusual.” It does not explain what this means to its readers; the Society simply leaves its description of “unusual” attached to and associated with “oral sex, within marriage.”

This lack of explanation combined with active involvement in Christians' private sexual practices seems to have resulted in a lingering disillusionment about how to practice sex within

¹² “Questions from Readers,” December 15, 1972, page 767 (emphasis original).

marriage among Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Society. Several years after the 1978 "Questions from Readers" oral sex is again referred to in *The Watchtower*, this time as a "perverted" sex act even for married couples! This article also refers to itself as "an amplification and adjustment in understanding of the Society's earlier positions, namely, as published in *The Watchtower* of November 15, 1974 (pages 703-704) and February 15, 1978 (pages 30-32).

This "adjustment in understanding" is given by the Society so "those who acted on the basis of the knowledge they had at the time are not to be criticized."¹³ Clearly, the Society was aware of the impact its presentation on sex practices within marriage, including oral sex, was having on its members. The present position of Jehovah's Witnesses associated with the Watchtower Society is that sex acts (such as oral copulation) are between a husband and a wife within marriage. I say this based on the following presentations of "oral" sex in these contexts within *The Watchtower*:

Finally, you must keep yourself morally clean. The Bible urges: "Flee from fornication." (1 Corinthians 6:18) The original Greek word for fornication, *por-nei'a*, refers to all illicit sexual activity involving the use of the genital organs carried on outside the bonds of marriage. That would include oral sex and the deliberate fondling of sexual organs.¹⁴

What is meant by the word "fornication"? It comes from the Greek word *por-nei'a*, which is sometimes used to apply to sexual relations between unmarried people. (1 Corinthians 6:9) Elsewhere, such as at Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, the term is broader in meaning and refers additionally to adultery, incest, and bestiality. Other sexual practices between

¹³ "Honor Godly Marriage!" *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1983, page 31. The Society's position must be accepted by all members of the Watchtower congregations. Consider, "Approved association with Jehovah's Witnesses requires accepting the entire range of the true teachings of the Bible, including those Scriptural beliefs that are unique to Jehovah's Witnesses [who are associated with the Watchtower Society]" ("Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1986, page 31 [underlining added]).

¹⁴ "Youths—Resist the Spirit of the World," *The Watchtower*, September 1, 1999, pages 12-13 (underlining added).

individuals not married to each other, such as oral and anal sex and the sexual manipulation of another person's genitalia, can also be designated as *por-nei'a*.¹⁵

The Greek word *por-nei'a*, translated “fornication,” has a fairly broad meaning. It relates to sexual relations involving persons not married to each other and focuses on the misuse of the sexual organs. *Por-nei'a* includes such acts as oral sex, anal sex, and masturbating another person—conduct commonly associated with houses of prostitution. People who think that such acts are not “fornication” are fooling themselves and have fallen victim to one of Satan's snares. (2 Timothy 2:26)¹⁶

Because the Watchtower Society's explanations and handling of sex practices by married persons, I felt it necessary to include this discussion here in order to try and help restore a clear and balanced perspective for sex by Christians, within marriage. Christian Witnesses of Jah leave questions about sexual conduct between married persons and Jah God, that is, so long as there are not good reasons in the Bible which classify the sex act or the sexual relationship as something *against* what can be reasonably shown to be God's will for us.

Christian Witnesses of Jah trust in a God who not only understands our sexual desires but who *gave us* the desire for sex, along with the ability to enjoy it with another person as we “fill the earth and subdue it.”—Genesis 1:28.

Sexual Orientation

When we today speak about a person's “sexual orientation,” often we are referring to a person's (or to our own) sexual inclinations or feelings, that is, to which “sex” (male or female) we are attracted. Male humans are mostly attracted to female humans; female humans are mostly attracted to male humans. Each sex comes complete with an anatomy (physical structure) and a physiology (the functions of our anatomy) which completes

¹⁵ “A Godly View of Moral Cleanness,” *The Watchtower*, November 1, 2000, page 8.

¹⁶ “Maintain Chastity by Safeguarding Your Heart,” *The Watchtower*, February 15, 2004, page 13 (underlining added).

each other through sexual contact. By design, then, males are meant for females and females for males. This is evident by our physicality which allows both males and females to have a pleasurable sexual experience, which can also result in the birth of a human being.

While it is possible to have a pleasurable sexual experience with a member of the same sex, males who have sexual contact with other males and females who have sexual contact with other females cannot through their same-sex relationship bring forth children. Though homosexuals can adopt children, and while certainly homosexuals can at times be better parents in today's society than many heterosexuals, the fact remains that neither nature nor Jah God permits homosexuals to have children through sexual union. Therefore, sex between homosexuals can only be pleasurable or an expression of love and passion, though the primary purpose (both according to nature and according to the Bible) behind a pleasurable sexual experience (reproduction) is not a natural part of the homosexual experience.

Yet, many homosexuals want to be Christian, believing that Jesus taught the truth even if it runs contrary to how they may naturally "feel." For the same reason, many heterosexuals deny our natural feelings for members of the opposite sex (compare Matthew 19:10-12). Christian Witnesses of Jah love all men and women, and we recognize that we all need help. But there does not appear to be much of an effort among Christian groups today to truly understand and properly evaluate homosexual feelings or relationships, that is, in order to work with those who are willing to make personal sacrifices so they can speak about Jah, and so they can be a follower of Jesus. None of us have to be (or can be) perfect in this world, at least not according to the Bible.—1 John 1:8-10.

While homosexual relationships are based on expressions of affection and love between members of the same sex, monogamous heterosexual relationships involve sex that is consistent with our evident design and complementary anatomy and physiology, this so sex is pleasurable and leads to human reproduction. In spite of these differences, Christians should be more accepting of a homosexual and of his or her representation that they are gay naturally, even if this means the homosexual is

naturally inclined toward what is otherwise *unnatural*, namely, homosexual sex.

However, though some of us today may accept that homosexual feelings of attraction are in some sense natural from birth for some, nearly two thousand years ago one Christian wrote the following about what was considered the “natural use” of males and of females in comparison to what was considered to be a sexual use “contrary to nature.” Consider:

Romans 1:24, 26-27

Therefore God, in keeping with the desires of their hearts, ... gave them up to disgraceful sexual appetites, for both their females changed the natural use of themselves into one contrary to nature; and likewise even the males left the natural use of the female and became violently inflamed in their lust toward one another, males with males, working what is obscene and receiving in themselves the full recompense, which was due for their error. [Underlining added.]

The “natural use” of males and females for sexual purposes is sex involving the male penis and the female vagina, where sexual climax results in the release (ejaculation) of male sperm which can then combine with a female’s egg and create a human fetus. The fetus, or unborn child, can then grow into fully developed human once the female gives birth, usually after a period of about nine months. While male-male and female-female sex can result in a pleasurable sexual experience including orgasm, sex between people with the same gender do not naturally produce a child. For this reason, homosexual sex is considered by Christians and by others to be ‘unnatural’: it cannot reproduce the main thing for which sex is intended, namely, the reproduction of human life.

The reproductive limitations on homosexual sex are because sex between males is often anal sex, which involves the use of the male penis and the human anus. But the human anus is nothing like the female vagina. Female vaginas are areas of the body through which humans are born into this world. The human anus is an opening in our bodies through which waste is removed. Though adults can experience orgasm through sexual acts involving either the human anus or vagina, only male ejaculation

into a female vagina through sex can create human life. Male ejaculation into a human anus does nothing but combine the male sperm with the body's discharges of waste and bacteria. So the differences between the two are significant and evident.¹⁷

Putting aside the clear differences involved with homosexual sex (namely, sexual relations with a person of the same gender) and heterosexual sex (sexual relations with a person of the opposite gender), there is the question of "love." Homosexuals claim to "love" each other in ways similar to the love heterosexuals have or show for their sexual partners. Thus, it is no longer as simple of a question as what is the evident intent of the one who designed us or of nature's purpose in our development as male and female humans.

To truly help others in ways beyond our own experience, we should first understand the person's actual needs or condition. Often questions involving sex or sexual orientation are too complicated to share with many others, and so the best assistance any Christian Witness of Jah can give to others is what we need ourselves: A means of defining and accepting beliefs on which we can rely, which we can trust, and which in acting upon we can see evident benefits, and thus show our beliefs are indeed based on *the best* available reasons.

When it comes to questions having to do with our natural-born desires or "feelings," it is often too easy for heterosexuals to

¹⁷ The physiological differences between the anus and the vagina, and the health risks involved with anal sex are also well documented. Dr. John R. Diggs, Jr. has had first-hand experience in treating many of the problems resulting from anal sex, and as a result he writes:

The rectum is significantly different from the vagina with regard to suitability for penetration by a penis. The vagina has natural lubricants and is supported by a network of muscles. It is composed of a mucus membrane with a multi-layer stratified squamous epithelium that allows it to endure friction without damage and to resist the immunological actions caused by semen and sperm. In comparison, the anus is a delicate mechanism of small muscles that comprise an "exit-only" passage. With repeated trauma, friction and stretching, the sphincter loses its tone and its ability to maintain a tight seal. Consequently, anal sex leads to leakage of fecal material that can easily become chronic. The potential for injury is exacerbated by the fact that the intestine has only a single layer of cells separating it from highly vascular tissue, that is, blood. Therefore, any organisms that are introduced into the rectum have a much easier time establishing a foothold for infection than they would in a vagina. The single layer tissue cannot withstand the friction associated with penile penetration, resulting in traumas that expose both participants to blood, organisms in feces, and a mixing of body fluids. [*The Health Risks of Gay Sex* (Corporate Research Council [2008], page 3 [listed with a link under "S" in the Elihu Books Topical Index]).

say *they do not believe* anyone is “born gay.” However, if a homosexual expresses that he or she can identify with a desire that is homosexual throughout his or her life, Christians cannot assume that such a feeling, even from birth, is wrong or impossible in this world. While it is also understandable why heterosexual Christians believe their beliefs are based on good reasons (namely, for example, the physiological and anatomical sexual complements of men and women, considered above), heterosexuals cannot speak fully, that is (in this particular case), experientially to the question of how a homosexual person naturally “feels.”

I know of no good reasons today that can establish one way or another whether a person can in fact be born with feelings of attraction for members of the same sex, that is, with a physiology and an anatomy that does not complement the physiology and anatomy to which the homosexual is attracted. The anatomy and the physiology of the homosexual are exactly the same as the one to whom the homosexual is attracted (unless, of course, the person is *bisexual*, in which case there is apparently an attraction to *both* members of the same and members of the opposite sex). So there is an evident difference in the extent to which homosexuals and heterosexuals can truly complement each other, and also where it concerns the resulting, possible effects of their sexual union.

How, though, can Christians today address questions of sexual orientation in a way that is both faithful to what we accept as Christian beliefs, and also sensitive to the desires of some which differ from our own? Indeed, in what ways can Christians be more understanding and inclusive in order to work with homosexuals who also want to give Jah praise and to do good in Jesus of Nazareth’s name?

Christians base their beliefs about what is acceptable sexual conduct on the Bible, and on the good reasons available and discernable in the creation of the world around us. While we cannot say definitively whether a homosexual’s disposition is “natural” (that is, from birth) or learned (and if learned then the behavior could of course be *unlearned*), Christians must do at least two things when it comes to dealing with beliefs and practices in the world around us: 1) We must base our beliefs

(and, hence, our decisions on how to act) on the best available reasons, and 2) we must try to help others draw close to God but without making determinations about how a person “feels” when it comes to sinful acts.

We all sin at times, and so we all *feel* like sinning at least to some extent (compare James 1:14-15). With this sinfulness accepted for all of us to differing degrees based on the extent to which we are able to resist sin (like Joseph did [Genesis 39:7-9]), how can Christians support *Christian* beliefs concerning sex between a married man and woman and still keep from discriminating against those who represent that they are homosexual from birth?

Christians follow Jesus of Nazareth. Though none of the NT Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and teachings directly speak against homosexual behavior, the OT does strongly warn against homosexual acts (Leviticus 18:22). Though Christians are not bound by OT laws, many of them are consistent with what the NT teaches. These OT teachings include prohibitions against same-sex relationships.—Leviticus 20:13; compare the things “the Law” is said to have been “promulgated” for in 1 Timothy 1:8-11.

Further, neither in the OT nor in the NT do we find any guidelines or provisions for homosexual sex, relationships, or families. The only positive counsel given in the Bible for marital and sexual relationships is that involving a man and a woman, the only two who, through sexual union, can naturally reproduce. In addition to Paul's teaching on what is a “natural use” of males and females, Jesus taught this with respect to God's intention in creating man and woman (with underlining added):

Matthew 19:4-6

[Jesus said:] “... he who created them from [the] beginning made them male and female and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and will stick to his wife, and the two will be one flesh’? So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has yoked together let no man put apart.”

This is the Christian position on sex and marriage. It does not, however, mean that Christians cannot accept that there are conditions present today (in us and on the earth in which we live) that often lead to various forms of deviancy from what is said by Jesus to have been God's original intent when making male and female humans.

Indeed, what Jesus teaches is also more consistent with the good reasons cited above that have to do with our design. Pleasurable use of each other is one thing, but the intent behind our design is plain for all to see and that is why Paul speaks the way he does in Romans 1:24, 26-27, namely, about what is "natural" and what is "unnatural." But where does that leave the person who claims to have been born as a homosexual and who continues to struggle being a Christian (compare Romans 7:13-35)? Should Christians simply quote the Bible and leave homosexuals with feelings of dread or despair, unsure of whether they can ever have God's approval, or join others in praising Jah?

Christians should not discourage homosexuals from being open and honest about how they feel, as long as it is not an inappropriate occasion for giving personal information about one's feelings for another, or for people in general. Homosexual Christians need to be open to be at peace with themselves and with others, like any one of us would also want to be. Indeed, this is the only way to be truly effective in honestly presenting the good news about how, no matter what we do or have done in this world, if we trust in Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings we can be pleasing to him and to the God of Moses. Then someday we will all live according to God's further design and intention or will (Matthew 6:10), in a place where "the former things will not be called to mind, neither will they come up into the heart."—Isaiah 65:17.

While heterosexual Christians should be more inclusive and understanding of homosexual Christians, at the same time homosexual Christians should be more conscious of the difficulties that are often present for a heterosexual who is not very familiar with homosexual people. Therefore, as Christians, as people who want to do what is right for good reasons but who also recognize our own faults and the need for forgiveness, we should try to 'please all people' and 'to not be seeking our own

advantage but that of many, so we may be saved.’—1 Corinthians 10:32-33.

Christians reach out to all persons, not judgmentally, but by accepting each other for who we are and then by working together to better ourselves in accordance with the will of Jah God through faith in Jesus. Though at times we may struggle and even fall, if we get up and work hard at gaining control over our sexual desires we can still be presented ‘as a bride for our husband.’—1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Revelation 21:2, 9.

Uses of Blood

To ‘use’ blood it must first be removed from an animal or from a human and then the blood or parts of it are used, tested, processed, stored, or discarded. Before blood is removed from an animal or from a human, it carries “nourishment, electrolytes, hormones, vitamins, antibodies, heat, and oxygen to the tissues and [blood takes] away waste matter and carbon dioxide.”¹⁸ Note that blood itself is *not* any of the things which it carries or removes from the body. Therefore, one of the questions for Christians and for others today is often whether the Bible speaks against any specific uses of blood?

The clearest uses of blood which the Bible can be shown to have prohibited in both OT and NT times are eating blood and eating “flesh with its soul—its blood,” or “things strangled” (compare Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10-14; Acts 15:29; but see Deuteronomy 14:21), as I will explain further in this section. In order to properly evaluate other uses of blood (that is, other than eating it *as food*), we must first ask what uses of blood were known, practiced, and/or expressly prohibited in biblical times. Then we can determine how any such prohibitions might apply to similar or other uses of blood today.

In the Old Testament books of the Bible, eating blood and “flesh with ... blood” is prohibited. Also, in the NT book of Acts there are three texts which express the early Christian perspective on the use of blood, namely, Acts 15:20, 29, and 21:25. Though I

¹⁸ *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, Clayton L. Thomas, ed., 16th edition (Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis Company, 1989), page 223, under **Blood**.

will discuss these texts in greater detail later in this section, when blood is eaten *as food* it is broken down and consumed through the digestion process. However, blood circulating in the body *as blood* carries the “nourishment” provided by food. Therefore, the two processes of eating blood *as food* and transfusing blood *as blood* are vastly different from each other.

Eaten blood is a food. After it is eaten and digested, then like other foods it may provide some nourishment which blood serving *as blood* “carries” throughout the body. Transfused blood is not itself food and it itself is not “nourishment” for the body. That is why if a person who is malnourished or starving is given only an injection of blood, the injected (but not eaten) blood will *not* save a person from malnourishment or from starving.

In spite of the fact that transfused blood is not used *as food* for the body, members of the Watchtower Society reject medical transfusions of whole blood *and* transfusions of blood’s four primary components (red cells, white cells, platelets, and plasma).¹⁹ Previously I have written on the subject of Jehovah’s Witnesses and blood transfusions. I presented arguments for and against different teachings published by the Society on uses of blood.²⁰ The evidence I presented supports the following partial timeline for the Watchtower Society’s blood policy since 1930:

1930: First reference to blood transfusions in the *Watch Tower*, which are listed along with “medicines,” “transplanting of monkey glands,” “massage,” “diet,” “surgery,” and other

¹⁹ See the Society’s answers to the “Questions from Readers” published in *The Watchtower*, June 15, 2000, pages 29-31, and the “Questions from Readers” published in *The Watchtower*, June 15, 2004, pages 29-31. However, it should be noted that some recent adjustments in the Society’s blood policy may permit a Witness loyal to the Society to re-use his or her own withdrawn blood. For example, in a September 19, 2000, Press Release issued by the Office of Public Information of Jehovah’s Witnesses who are associated with the Watchtower Society, we read (with underlining added), “When it comes to hemodilution, cell salvage, or other procedures such as withdrawing blood to tag it or mix it with medicine and returning it to the patient ... a Christian must decide for himself ...” So there *is* a sense in which a Christian associated with the Watchtower Society can have his or her own blood ‘withdrawn’ to a point where it can be ‘tagged or mixed with medicine and then returned to the patient.’

²⁰ See Chapter 8 of my *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, Second Edition (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 2000), pages 427-446, and the Third Dissertation of my *Three Dissertations on the Teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2002), pages 170-196.

similar procedures and remedies as some of the means by which "imperfect, fallen men" have tried to cure the different ailments of our society.²¹

- 1934: First positive reference involving the use of blood for transfusions.²²
- 1936: First time the Society applies the biblical prohibition against eating and drinking blood to "any other means," though blood transfusions are not named explicitly.²³
- 1940: Second positive reference to blood transfusions, again in the context of saving a person's life.²⁴
- 1943: Second time "the divine prohibition as to eating or partaking of blood" is extended to 'other means,' namely, to the use of cow's and horse's blood for human medical transfusions.²⁵
- 1944: First explicit inclusion of a blood "transfusion" in the prohibitions against eating blood given in Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 17:10-14.²⁶

²¹ "God's Kingdom is Here," *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, October 15, 1930, page 315.

²² "Using the Blood of Suicides," *The Golden Age*, January 17, 1934, vol. 15, no. 374, page 242, where we read (with underlining added):

It has been discovered that, if used within a few hours after death, the blood of suicides, or those who die of heart disease, or skull fractures, can be used for transfusion purposes to save the lives of the living. This is now done regularly in the Moscow hospital.

²³ "A Letter to the Lancaster (Pa.) School Board," *The Golden Age*, January 15, 1936, vol. 27, no. 426, pages 233-234.

²⁴ See "The Mending of a Heart," *Consolation*, December 25, 1940, page 19, which reads in part (with underlining added):

In New York city a housewife in moving a boarder's things accidentally shot herself through the heart with his revolver. She was rushed to a hospital, her left breast was cut around, four ribs were cut away, the heart was lifted out, three stitches were taken, one of the attending physicians in the great emergency gave a quart of his blood for transfusion, and today the woman lives and smiles gaily over what happened to her in the busiest 23 minutes of her life.

²⁵ "Horse Blood for Transfusions," *Consolation*, December 22, 1943, page 23.

²⁶ "The Stranger's Right Maintained," *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1944, page 362, par. 32, which reads in part (with underlining added):

Not only as a descendant of Noah, but now also as one bound by God's law to Israel which incorporated the everlasting covenant regarding the sanctity of life-sustaining blood, the stranger was forbidden to eat or drink blood, whether by transfusion or by the mouth. (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:10-14)

- 1945: The 1944 position which linked blood transfusions with the prohibitions against eating blood given in Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 17:10-14 is reaffirmed, though there is not yet any explicit, binding prohibition against blood transfusions put forth by the Society.²⁷
- 1948-
- 1950: The Society firmly links blood transfusions with the biblical prohibitions against eating blood. However, at this time individual members of the Society could still decide whether to have a blood transfusion, that is, without fear of being excommunicated or shunned by other members.²⁸
- 1951-
- 1953: Taking a blood transfusion is referred to as “disobedience of God’s commands” which “could cost one eternal life,”²⁹ though at this time individual members of the congregation were still permitted to decide whether to have a blood transfusion without fear of excommunication.

²⁷ “Immovable for the Right to Worship,” *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1945, under the heading “Sanctity of Blood,” on page 199, par. 18. See also page 201, par. 25, where we read about not taking “blood directly into the human body.”

²⁸ See “Dangers of Blood Transfusion,” *Awake!* October 22, 1948, page 12; “Is Blood Transfusion Scriptural?” *Awake!* September 22, 1949, pages 25-27; “On Blood Transfusion,” *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1949, pages 367-368; “Further on Blood Transfusions,” *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1950, pages 143-144.

²⁹ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1951, pages 414-416. In one of the responses to the questions published in this *Watchtower*, we are told (with underlining added): “Any saving of life accomplished by transfusions is short-lived. And doing it in disobedience of God’s commands could cost one eternal life.” But in response to the final question this same *Watchtower* reads, “Jehovah’s Witnesses do not oppose the people’s right to decide for himself what he can conscientiously do.” However, what follows in the remainder of its answer is clearly written to help members of the Society understand this in reference to non-Witnesses (see “Questions from Readers,” July 1, 1951, pages 414-416). In “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, February 1, 1952, page 96, the Society writes that it does not “advise on health matters except as they may involve Scriptural issues, such as in the case of blood transfusions.” In “Tolerance for Unity and Increase,” *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1952, page 551, we read (with underlining added), “Regardless of how unpopular it may make them, they will refuse to heel men, to bow down to any image or likeness, to take blood transfusions, etc.” In “The Bible and Medical Science,” *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1953, page 451, blood transfusions are again said to be prohibited by the OT and NT commands concerning the eating and drinking of blood, though once again nothing is said about punishing members of the organization who take blood transfusions.

- 1954: For the first time the Society singles out a blood *fraction* in connection with the Bible's prohibitions against eating blood. The use of the blood protein gamma globulin for inoculations in the fight against poliomyelitis is said to be "in the same category as blood transfusions as far as Jehovah's prohibition of taking blood into the system is concerned," because it is "made of whole blood."³⁰
- 1956: Blood fractions are again said to "come under scriptural ban" against blood, this time with the blood protein "albumin" mentioned by name.³¹
- 1958: The Society changes its previous position by no longer considering blood fractions taken from whole blood (such as gamma globulin) as prohibited by the Bible's teachings against eating blood.³²
- 1959: For the first time the Society teaches its members that "the removal of one's blood, storing it and later putting it back into the same person" is "a violation of the Scriptural

³⁰ "Gamma Globulin Versus Poliomyelitis," *Awake!* January 8, 1954, page 24. See also, "Thirteen-Year-Old Berlin Girl Keeps Integrity," *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1954, page 605; "Using Life in Harmony with the Will of God," *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1961, pages 559-566.

³¹ "Blood Fractions or Substances," *Awake!* September 8, 1956, page 20.

³² See "Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1958, page 478. Also, in "Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1958, on page 575 the Society responds to a question about whether the injection of serums and blood fractions (such as gamma globulin) for the purpose of building up resistance to disease is the same as drinking or transfusing blood or blood plasma. Consider the Society's answer (with underlining added):

No, it does not seem necessary that we put the two in the same category, although we have done so in times past. Each time the prohibition of blood is mentioned in the Scriptures it is in connection with taking it as food, and so it is as a nutrient that we are concerned with in its being forbidden. ... The injection of antibodies into the blood in a vehicle of blood serum or the use of blood fractions to create such antibodies is not the same as taking blood, either by mouth or by transfusion, as a nutrient to build up the body's vital forces. While God did not intend for man to contaminate his blood stream by vaccines, serums or [the use of] blood fractions, doing so does not seem to be included in God's expressed will forbidding blood as food. It would [now, late in 1958,] therefore be a matter of individual judgment whether one accepted such types of medication or not.

Again, transfused blood is *not* usable as "food" or as "nourishment" but only *as blood* which carries "nourishment ... to the tissues" (*Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, quoted earlier on page 570). The Society is in error in viewing transfused blood as if it is "food" or "nourishment," and in the process it has misapplied biblical texts which prohibit the use of blood as a "food" to medical transfusions of blood which are not for "food."

principles that govern the handling of blood.” The Society also taught that even if the removal and storage of a person’s own blood is “for a brief period of time, this would be a violation of the Scriptures.”³³ The only exception is if “hemorrhaging should occur at the time of an operation and by some means the blood is immediately channeled back into the body, this would be allowable.”³⁴

- 1961: The first explicit indication that a person associated with the Watchtower Society should be “disfellowshipped” if he or she refuses to accept that it is scripturally wrong to receive a blood transfusion, or to donate one’s own blood for medical transfusions. The Society’s reasoning here is, in part:

God’s law definitely says that the soul of man is in his blood [see Lev 17:11]. Hence the receiver of the blood transfusion is feeding upon a God-given soul as contained in the blood vehicle of a fellow man or of fellow men. This is a violation of God’s commands to Christians, the seriousness of which should not be minimized by any passing over of it lightly as being an optional matter for the conscience of any individual to decide upon.³⁵

The Watchtower Society refers to the receipt of a blood transfusion as if it is equivalent to “feeding.” Indeed, the *Watchtower* claims “the receiver of a blood transfusion” is

³³ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1959, page 640.

³⁴ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1959, page 640. Note the further qualification given by the Society in this regard on the same page (with underlining added):

The use of another person’s blood to “prime” any device employed in surgery is objectionable. In this case the blood would circulate through the system of the patient, becoming mixed with his own. Again, if one’s own blood would have to be withdrawn at intervals and stored until a sufficient amount had accumulated to set a machine in operation, this too would fall under Scriptural prohibition. The ones involved in the matter are in the best position to ascertain just how the blood would be handled and must bear responsibility before Jehovah for seeing that it is not handled unscripturally.

³⁵ “Questions from Readers,” *The Watchtower*, January 15, 1961, page 64. In the Society’s answer we are also told that if a Witness does take a blood transfusion because of weakness or immaturity, but then “begs divine forgiveness and forgiveness of God’s congregation on earth,” mercy should be “extended to him and he need not be disfellowshipped.” However, the person must “be put under surveillance” and “be instructed thoroughly according to the Scriptures upon this subject” (“Questions from Readers,” January 15, 1961, page 64 [underlining added]).

actually “feeding upon a God-given soul as contained in the blood.”

As I explained previously, a transfusion of blood is not the same thing as eating blood through the mouth. Eaten blood is digested as a food, while transfused blood remains usable as blood in our bodies. The Society has consistently failed to note this critical difference, which when considered shows there is no “feeding upon a God-given soul” taking place during a blood transfusion. More blood is simply being put into a human body to serve as blood, not to serve as food or “nourishment.” Transfused blood “carries” nourishment throughout the body; it is not itself the nourishment on which the body feeds.

Later in 1961, *The Watchtower* published an article called “Respect for the Sanctity of Blood.” In harmony with the earlier January 15, 1961 “Questions from Readers” (quoted on page 575), this article points out God’s laws to Noah and to Moses prohibited the use of blood for food *and* the storing of one’s own blood because “the soul or the life of the flesh is in the blood.”³⁶ The *Watchtower* also claims that even in times of emergency the Bible speaks out against the eating of blood:

Even in times of emergency it was recognized that there was no justification for setting aside the divine law concerning the sanctity of blood. This is shown by an occurrence when the army of Israel under King Saul was fighting the Philistines. It had been a hard fight and the men were at the point of exhaustion. “And the people began darting greedily at the spoil and taking sheep and cattle and calves and slaughtering them on the earth, and the people fell to eating along with the blood.” This was no insignificant thing, excusable because of the physical condition of the men. It was reported to Saul: “Look! The people are sinning against Jehovah by eating along with the blood.” (1 Sam. 14:32, 33) They did not view the matter as do certain rabbis today who theorize that any of the requirements of the Law can be set aside when the saving of a specific life is involved.³⁷ [Underlining added.]

³⁶ “Respect for the Sanctity of Blood,” *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1961, page 554, par. 4.

³⁷ “Respect for the Sanctity of Blood,” page 554, par. 5.

Here the Watchtower Society presents texts from 1 Samuel Chapter 14 as if they support the Society's own view that even if a person's life is at risk, blood should not be eaten even it is to save a person's life. Setting aside the separate question of whether transfusing blood *as blood* (not as food) is the same as eating blood *as food* (which is no longer usable as blood), there is nothing written in 1 Samuel 14:31-35 which says anything about people starving to death. Rather, the account states plainly the people were "very tired" and "greedily" plundered the spoil, eating sheep, cattle, and calves before bleeding them.

It is this inaction with respect to "flesh with its soul—its blood," that is in view in 1 Samuel 14:31-35, for it violates the Noachian and the Mosaic laws concerning the eating of flesh with its blood (Genesis 9:4; Deuteronomy 12:23; but compare Deuteronomy 14:21). Saul rebuked those who ate 'flesh with its blood,' telling them, "Bring near to me, each one of you, his bull and, each one, his sheep, and you must do the slaughtering in this place and the eating, and you must not sin against Jehovah by eating along with the blood" (verse 34 [underlining added]). There is nothing said here in this account about the "saving of a specific life," as the *Watchtower* claims. Further, this account has nothing to do with using blood *as blood*, but with "eating" it *as food*.

This *Watchtower* cites additional biblical accounts in support of its hardened position against blood transfusions, including 1 Chronicles 11:16-19 and 2 Samuel 23:14-17. In these accounts, David expresses his desire for "a drink of the water from the cistern of Bethlehem that is at the gate." Because of this, "three mighty men" in David's service go into the Philistine camp to draw water from the cistern and they bring it to David. David responds by pouring the water out and saying, "[Shall I drink] the blood of the men going at the risk of their souls?" The Watchtower Society interprets David's rejection of the water as if the water was actually blood, concluding that "not only did [David] abstain from animal blood [but] he avoided the far more gross wrong of consuming human blood"!³⁸

³⁸ "Respect for the Sanctity of Blood," page 559, par. 20.

The biblical record reveals it is *the life-threatening actions* of the three men which David rejected, not their actual "blood." Because these men risked their lives for something David could (and did) do without, David rejected the water since they had risked their lives to get it. But donating blood for others to use in medical treatments or emergencies does not carry with it the same risks as those who, according to 2 Samuel 23:16, "forced their way into the camp of the Philistines and drew water from the cistern of Bethlehem that is at the gate and came carrying and bringing it to David." Therefore, the Watchtower Society has again misapplied a biblical account which has nothing to do even with eating or drinking literal blood. Rather, it has to do with *unnecessarily risking our lives*, which is precisely what those who refuse acceptable medical treatments are doing.

This same 1961 *Watchtower* article mentions products made with dried plasma powder, which were used as a substitute for eggs in pastries, as well as "various tonics and tablets sold by druggists [who] show on their labels that they contain blood fractions such as hemoglobin."³⁹ *The Watchtower* then advises its readers to be cautious about such ingredients, and to do what is necessary to avoid them if they contain blood or blood fractions.

After noting the progress made in the use of medical transfusions of blood, *The Watchtower* article points out that "doctors use not only whole blood and blood plasma, which is the nearly colorless liquid in which the blood cells are carried, but also red cells apart from the plasma, and the various plasma proteins as they feel the need."⁴⁰ How are such medical treatments to be viewed by members of the Watchtower Society? *The Watchtower* answers:

Is God's law violated by such medical use of blood? Is it wrong to sustain life by infusions of blood or plasma or red cells or the various blood fractions? Yes! The law that God gave to Noah and which applies to all his descendants makes it wrong for anyone to eat blood, that is, to use the blood of

³⁹ "Respect for the Sanctity of Blood," page 557, par. 14. These same comments are repeated in the booklet, *Blood, Medicine and The Law of God* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1961), page 11.

⁴⁰ "Respect for the Sanctity of Blood," page 558, par. 15.

another creature to nourish or sustain one's life. ... [R]egardless of whether it is whole blood or a blood fraction, whether it is blood taken from one's own body or that taken from someone else, whether it is administered as a transfusion or as an injection, the divine law applies.⁴¹

As the above clearly shows, the Watchtower Society at one time prohibited those loyal to its teachings from donating blood for medical transfusions and for 'sustaining life' by "infusions of blood or plasma or red cells or the various blood fractions." The Society's law is here said to be binding on all of its members, "regardless of whether it is whole blood or a blood fraction." From this point forward, then, any member of the Watchtower Society who unrepentantly disagreed with this new blood policy (which now prohibited use of whole blood *and* "various blood fractions") "must be cut off by disfellowshipping."⁴²

Later in 1961, *The Watchtower* carried a series of questions and answers concerning different uses of blood.⁴³ In response to the first question, *The Watchtower* explained that a person should investigate to see if the albumin in a food product is from blood, from milk, or from eggs. "However," *The Watchtower* concludes, "if the label says that certain tablets contain hemoglobin [a blood fraction], similar checking will reveal that this [hemoglobin] is from blood; so a Christian knows, without asking, that he should avoid such a preparation."⁴⁴ In response to

⁴¹ "Respect for the Sanctity of Blood," pages 558, 559, pars. 16 and 19 (underlining added). See also *Blood, Medicine and The Law of God*, page 14.

⁴² "Questions from Readers," January 15, 1961, page 64.

⁴³ "Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1961, page 669-670. The questions presented are: "How can one tell if meat purchased from a butcher or in some other market has been properly bled?" ... "Also, how can one tell if cold-meat loaves, pastry or preparations sold by druggists contain any blood or blood fractions?" ... "How can we harmonize the Scriptural counsel, 'Everything that is sold in a meat market keep eating, making no inquiry on account of your conscience' (1 Cor. 10:25), with the advice recently contained in *The Watchtower*, to make reasonable inquiry at places where one buys meat to be sure that it has been properly bled? (*The Watchtower*, September 15, 1961, page 557)" ... "In view of the Bible command on abstinence from blood, how are fish and insects to be prepared in order to be acceptable for food?" "Since the Bible forbids the eating of blood, how are Christians to view the use of serums and vaccines? Has the Society changed its viewpoint on this?"

⁴⁴ "Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1961, page 669 (underlining added).

the third question about the use of serums and vaccines, *The Watchtower* claims:

The Bible is very clear that blood could properly be used only on the altar; otherwise it was to be poured out on the ground. (Lev. 17:11-13) The entire modern medical practice involving the use of blood is objectionable from the Christian standpoint. Therefore the taking of a blood transfusion, or, in lieu of that, the infusing of some blood fraction to sustain one's life is wrong.⁴⁵

In 1961 another one of the Society's publications was even more specific when addressing the use of blood fractions, stating Jehovah's Witnesses would not consent to the medical use of "any kind of blood transfusion, or, in place of it, an infusion of any kind of blood fraction or substance."⁴⁶

Yet, since 1961 the Society's position has evolved to the point where today a member of the Watchtower Society can decide for him- or for herself whether to take "any kind of blood fraction or substance" (including hemoglobin), except for these four blood components: Red cells, white cells, plasma, and platelets, none of which are individually "blood."

In fact, today members of the Watchtower Society are permitted (that is, without any investigation by the Society's appointed representatives) to decide whether to donate their own

⁴⁵ "Questions from Readers," *The Watchtower*, November 1, 1961, page 670 (underlining added). See also "Carry Your Own Load of Responsibility," *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1963, where on page 124 we read in part (with underlining added):

As to blood transfusions, [a Christian] knows from his study of the Bible and the publications of the Watch Tower Society that this is an unscriptural practice. (Gen. 9:4; Acts 15:28, 29) Now it is up to him to carry his own load of responsibility in applying what the Scriptures have to say on this matter. One day he may go to the hospital for surgery. ... He need only ask the doctor: "From what was the plasma taken?" "How are the red cells obtained?" "Where did you get this substance?" If the answer is "Blood," he knows what course to take, for it is not just whole blood but anything that is derived from blood and used to sustain life or strengthen one that comes under this principle.

⁴⁶ *Blood, Medicine and The Law of God*, page 39 (underlining added).

blood for the purpose of obtaining a fraction from one these four (Society-prohibited) blood components.⁴⁷

A significant part of the problem with the Society's blood policy has to do with its unsupportable equation of eating blood *as food* with using blood *as blood*. Consider the following claim made by the Society, also published in 1961, after its ban against medical transfusions of whole blood and its ban against blood fractions in 1956 which the Society changed in 1958:

It is of no consequence that the blood is taken into the body through the veins instead of the mouth. Nor does the claim by some that it is not the same as intravenous feeding carry weight. The fact is that it nourishes or sustains the life of the body. In harmony with this is a statement in the book *Hemorrhage and Transfusion*, by George W. Crile, A.M., M.D., who quotes a letter from Denys, French physician and early researcher in the field of transfusions. It says: "In performing transfusion it is nothing else than nourishing by a shorter road than ordinary—that is to say, placing in the veins blood all made in place of taking food which only turns to blood after several changes."⁴⁸

Before I further address this question about whether a blood transfusion involves using blood *as food* or "nourishment," I will here give an extended quotation from an online response to the Society's use of *Hemorrhage and Transfusion*, by George W. Crile, A.M., M.D. In the cited publication is a letter from the "French physician and early researcher" referenced by *The Watchtower*. After noting "the Society did not inform anyone that Jean Babtiste Denys had done his research in the 1600's and had been dead for 257 years by 1961," Zack Daniels writes:

When viewed in its proper context, it is obvious that Crile was simply providing a historical narrative of the accidents, ignorance, and mistakes that befell the early researchers in this field and not seriously agreeing with the humorous level of

⁴⁷ See my *Three Dissertations*, pages 190-195, in particular the letter from one of the Society's agencies (the "Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses") to Cliff Roche dated July 30, 2001.

⁴⁸ "Respect for the Sanctity of Blood," *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1961, page 558, par. 18 (underlining added).

ignorance which he had found in a 252 year old (in 1909) research paper. Further, no one in their right mind even in 1909, let alone 1961, would have seriously believed Deny's own reason for making that statement—that the blood of the mother was continuously transfused into the body of the infant. ... Your blood carries nourishment to the cells of your body. This is done by the blood plasma and its solutes. Each and every cell of your body is nourished on an individual basis by being in direct contact with the blood stream. Your digestive system breaks the food you eat down into soluble materials that can diffuse into the plasma, namely amino acids, simple sugars, fatty acids, trace elements (vitamins and minerals) and water. The plasma, being mostly water itself, functions simply as the means of conveyance, in a manner analogous to the way your hand is the means of conveyance whereby nourishment is carried to your mouth. ... Despite this though, the Society's statements on the blood issue during this time period all reflected this mistaken idea.⁴⁹

There was no such thing in biblical times as a strictly medical (that is, a non-religious, non-dietary) use of blood, such as we find today in medical transfusion therapy. In spite of this, the Watchtower Society equates blood which is eaten and then digested *as food* with blood that is transfused to remain and to serve *as blood* in the human body, which is the very purpose for which Jah made blood. Consider the following presentation by the Society about why blood transfusions should be refused:

Q. Why did Octávio Corrêa refuse the blood transfusion?

A. Basically because of the Bible's prohibition as to the use of blood for nourishment or to prolong life. The *Great Encyclopedia Delta Larousse* (Portuguese) says: "Blood is living tissue that runs in the circulatory system and whose main functions are: 1) to carry needed nutritive substances and oxygen to all tissues in the body; 2) to collect and take residues, useless or dangerous to the cellular activity, to the excretory organs (kidneys, lungs, skin, etc.)." (P. 6079) Thus, blood nourishes and cleans the body. Jehovah God, who knows

⁴⁹ Zack Daniels, "The Evolution of the Watchtower Blood Policy," online article at one time available in 2009 on the Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood web site (<http://www.ajwr.org>).

more about blood than anyone else, prohibited the eating of blood. His Word, the Bible, states: “Only do not eat flesh with its life in it, that is, the blood.”—Gen. 9:4, Pontifical Bible Institute, Rome, Paulinas Editions, Brazil. [Underlining added.]⁵⁰

The Watchtower publication *Awake!* here quotes a source which speaks of blood as ‘carrying needed nutritive substances.’ But the Society then equates “eating of blood” with transfusing blood! The Society has failed to note the evident differences between eaten blood and transfused blood, even when it quotes a publication which makes the differences plain! In this same light, consider these more recent claims from *The Watchtower*:

Decades ago Jehovah’s Witnesses made their stand clear. For example, they supplied an article to *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (November 27, 1981; reprinted in *How Can Blood Save Your Life?* pages 27-9). That article quoted from [1] *Genesis, Leviticus, and Acts*. It said: “While these verses are not stated in medical terms, *Witnesses view them as ruling out transfusion of whole blood, packed RBCs [red blood cells], and plasma, as well as WBC [white blood cell] and platelet administration.*” [2] *The 2001 textbook Emergency Care, under “Composition of the Blood,” stated: “The blood is made up of several components: plasma, red and white blood cells, and platelets.”* [3] *Thus, in line with medical facts, Witnesses refuse transfusions of whole blood or of any of its four primary components.*⁵¹

I have added emphasis to three key claims in the above quote from *The Watchtower*. I have also numbered each point in order to help separate them and to make for an easier evaluation of the claims made:

[1]: *Genesis, Leviticus, and Acts ... [rule] out transfusion[s] of whole blood, packed [red blood cells], and plasma, as well as [white blood cells] and platelet administration.*

⁵⁰ “Freedom of Worship Triumphant,” *Awake!* August 8, 1977, page 7.

⁵¹ “Be Guided by the Living God,” *The Watchtower*, June 15, 2004, pages 21-22, par. 11 (emphasis added).

Comment: Not one text in any of the three biblical books referenced by *The Watchtower* says or even implies anything about using blood for medical transfusions and where the blood continues to serve *as blood*, not *as food* or “nourishment” in the human body. Further, not one of the three biblical books cited explicitly teaches or implies anything about uses of blood’s major “components” (red cells, white cells, platelets, and plasma), as if they should under any circumstance be viewed differently from uses of blood’s “fractions.”

[2]: *The 2001 textbook Emergency Care, under “Composition of the Blood,” stated: “The blood is made up of several components: plasma, red and white blood cells, and platelets.”*

Comment: The Society here quotes a textbook definition for “blood” which makes it plain that blood is “made up of several components,” namely, “plasma, red and white blood cells, and platelets.” After noting this textbook’s definition, *The Watchtower* concludes:

[3]: *Thus, in line with medical facts, Witnesses refuse transfusions of whole blood or of any of its four primary components.*

Comment: The only ‘fact’ from *The Watchtower*’s quote from *Emergency Care* is that blood is “made up of several components.” In stating this, the medical textbook is not claiming any one of these four components of blood *is blood* or should be considered *as blood*. Indeed, the textbook’s definition shows all four are necessary for “blood.” *None* of them are “blood” individually, so there is no ‘medical fact’ with which the Society is here “in line with” as it relates to refusing “transfusions of whole blood or of any of its four primary components.” Yet, this is the stated reason for why the Society quotes *Emergency Care*’s definition of “blood” in the first place!

The definition of “blood” from *Emergency Care*, quoted with approval by *The Watchtower*, actually supports the position of those who reject the Society’s view that these four components of blood should be viewed individually as “blood.” For this and for other related reasons on December 2, 2007, I wrote a letter to the Governing Body of those Jehovah’s Witnesses who are still associated with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. I asked about the Body’s blood policy, specifically as it relates to its quotation and use of the definition for “blood” from *Emergency Care* in its June 15, 2004, issue. After quoting the relevant part of

this *Watchtower* (quoted and evaluated on pages 583-584), I asked:

If you could, please, explain why f[r]actions of blood are a conscience matter whereas larger components of blood are not a conscience matter, when in fact neither blood's fractions nor blood's larger components are themselves blood from a medical perspective, this might help resolve some of the confusion over the current policy. Also, if you could please explain what "medical facts" you believe the current position is in line with as it relates to the above definition of blood, this would also be of great assistance. At the present time, I can only see that the above cited definition gives a listing of blood's components. I do not yet see how a presentation of the components of blood gives any support for a rejection of the components as if they are blood. But I am open to any explanation you may have to offer.⁵²

The Governing Body has not responded to me directly or elsewhere that I can see, about any of these issues. At the same time, the Watchtower Society continues to let its members and its readers believe the "2001 textbook Emergency Care" provides "medical facts" with which the Society's blood policy of refusing "transfusions of whole blood or of any of its four primary components" is "in line with." But this could only be true if the quoted textbook actually gives "medical facts" with which the Society's position in 'refusing transfusions of whole blood or of any of its four primary components' is "in line with." It does not.

Simply quoting a medical textbook's definition for "blood" showing that blood has four primary components (from which components blood fractions are then derived) does not provide

⁵² Letter from Greg Stafford to the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses dated December 2, 2007. A copy of this letter and of other letters I have sent to the Governing Body on the subject of the use of blood are available online as an addendum to my answer to the question, "What is your position on the use of blood, and how will this be presented in Jehovah Witnesses Defended, Third Edition?" in "*Upon the Lampstand*" (February 20, 2007 [rev. May 3, 2008]), pages 1-7, available through the Elihu Books web site (<http://www.elihubooks.com>). The Governing Body has not responded to any of my letters sent to them on this subject, which letters are dated February 25, 2007, August 15, 2007, and December 2, 2007. See also my more recent article, "The Watchtower's Prohibition Against Non-Food Uses of Blood," *Watching the Ministry* (January 20, 2010), available through <http://www.elihubooks.com>.

any “medical facts” which support the Society’s view that these components should be rejected as blood.⁵³ Indeed, the Society not only misapplies the textbook’s definition as support for its own unique view of blood’s components, but it does so using a definition which contradicts the Society’s view of blood’s four primary components! The definition for blood quoted by *The Watchtower* clearly shows the four components of blood are *not* blood individually, since blood is “made up of” *all* four primary components collectively.

The Society has not put forth any medical, scientific, or biblical good reasons for viewing blood’s components as if any one of them are or should be considered *as blood*. There are also no good reasons to associate the Bible’s command to avoid eating blood *as food* with medical transfusions of blood, or of

⁵³ Components of blood are not blood, just as hemoglobin (which the Society no longer prohibits) is not “blood,” though it is also a substance that is derived from blood. In treating blood’s four primary components as if they are “blood,” the Watchtower Society’s blood policy contains a logical fallacy known as the “fallacy of division.” This fallacy in reasoning occurs “when the conclusion of an argument depends on the erroneous transference of an attribute from a whole (or a class) onto its parts (or members)” (Patrick J. Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 5th ed. [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1994], page 166). Hurley gives the following example on the same page:

Salt is a nonpoisonous compound.

Therefore, its component elements, sodium and chlorine, are nonpoisonous.

The above fallacy in reasoning is similar to the Society’s argument in relation to blood and to its four components. What may be true of the whole of “salt” is not necessarily true of its component parts. In the above example what is claimed to be true of salt (it is non-poisonous) is not true of its parts, since salt can be taken harmlessly into the body in certain amounts while its component elements when ingested or exposed to other elements can be very dangerous. Though there can be pieces or parts of larger wholes which are essentially the same as the whole of which they are parts (such as a broken piece of writing chalk [both the original whole piece and the broken part are “chalk”]), the same is not true for blood and for its components. In spite of the fact that blood has “pieces” or components which are *not* the same as the whole of which they are parts, the Society transfers “an attribute from a whole [that is, ‘blood’] ... onto its parts [red cells, white cells, platelets, and plasma].” *The Watchtower* also implies that the 2001 textbook *Emergency Care* which it quotes agrees with this fallacious transfer of attributes from the whole of “blood” to its component parts! Today the Society’s fallacious transfer of attributes of blood to its parts applies only to the four primary components of blood, though at one time the Society extended its fallacious transfer of blood’s attributes to “anything that is derived from blood and used to sustain life or strengthen one” (“Carry Your Own Load of Responsibility,” *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1963, page 124 [quoted more fully in note 45]).

blood's four primary components, none of which are transfused *as food*. Indeed, again, what the Society has put forth from among the available medical textbooks contradicts the Society's view of blood's four primary components.

Rather than provide a basis for refusing proper medical treatment which does not involve the use of blood *as food*, the OT and the NT prohibitions concerning the use of blood have to do with *eating* blood and of *eating* 'flesh with its blood' *as food*. Consider how these prohibitions are presented in the NT book of Acts, and how they are linked to what is taught in the OT (with underlining added):

Acts 15:13, 19-21, 22, 23, 28-29; 21:25

After they quit speaking, James answered, saying: "... Hence my decision is not to trouble those from the nations who are turning to God, but to write them to abstain [Greek: form of *apecho*] from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For from ancient times Moses has had in city after city those who preach him, because he is read aloud in the synagogues on every sabbath." Then the apostles and the older men together with the whole congregation ... by their hand they wrote ... "For the holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to YOU, except these necessary things, to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication. If YOU carefully keep yourselves from these things, YOU will prosper. Good health to YOU! ... As for the believers from among the nations, we have sent out, rendering our decision that they should keep themselves [Greek: form of *phyllasso*, meaning 'to guard against' or 'beware'] from what is sacrificed to idols as well as from blood and what is strangled and from fornication.

In the Second Edition of my book, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics* (2000), I added a chapter called "Blood and the Bible." In that chapter I examined the words of the above quoted NT texts which contain what is known as the "Apostolic Decree." I focused in particular on the meaning of the words, "abstain ... from blood," as they relate to the teachings of the Watchtower Society.

At the time, I felt it was my obligation to 'give a reason' for my beliefs about the use of whole blood, which beliefs I had learned through association with the Watchtower Society (1 Peter 3:15). In 1999/2000 my beliefs concerning the use of blood were consistent with the Watchtower Society, though I did not yet have a complete understanding of all of the issues involved with the Society's view of blood's components and of fractions of those components. So I left out questions having to do with anything other than with what is actually presented in the Bible, namely, with "blood."

Where it concerned the use of whole blood, having grown up in and around the Watchtower Society in 1999/2000 I believed there was good "reason to be cautious about taking blood into our system in any form."⁵⁴ During this time, I also believed "the Bible's command to 'abstain from blood' [could] rightly be understood as covering all forms of taking blood into one's system."⁵⁵ My reasoning was as follows:

In reading the command to "abstain ... from blood" it is clear that something is missing: a verb. The Decree does not come right out and say, "abstain from drinking or eating blood." Yet, a verb of some kind is needed to complete the thought. ... In the context of the Apostolic Decree, which no doubt builds on the prohibition against eating and drinking blood in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is clear that either or both of these two verbs (eating and drinking) should be understood, especially since these were the only two known methods of taking blood into one's body in the ancient world ... It is of interest to note that although James does draw from the Law of Moses which specifically mentions the "eating" of blood, he himself does not say to abstain from *eating* blood, but, simply, to "abstain from blood." He makes no qualification, and does not limit it to "eating" or "drinking," as if for food.⁵⁶

While the above represents part of my reasoning concerning uses of blood, what I did not fully understand, properly defend, or duly emphasize in the Second Edition of this book is the position

⁵⁴ *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, page 445.

⁵⁵ *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, page 428.

⁵⁶ *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, Second Edition, pages 433, 441.

held by many *other* Jehovah's Witnesses who disagreed both with me and with the Watchtower Society. Though I knew I had left the area of blood components and blood fractions open for future discussion, this part of the issue became more and more pressing. As I started to look closer at the Society's entire blood policy, it became increasingly clear to me that there was much more involved with the Society's teachings on the use of blood than what most members of the Society likely realize.

Further complicating matters is that there are several biblical prohibitions concerning the use of blood but which are presented without verbs used explicitly in defining the prohibited use(s). Thus, some texts might be more easily misunderstood than others. But for good reasons which I came to learn from others and through my own study of the Bible and Watchtower and other literature, I wrote the following nearly two years after my earlier position:

Since the Bible really only speaks definitively about eating and drinking blood, "any other means" by which blood could be used would have to be evaluated in its own right. Whether or not whole blood transfusions or the use of blood for the derivation of its component or fractioned parts come under the biblical prohibition against eating and drinking blood is unclear. ... It may be that God *did* intend for humans to 'abstain from transfusing their own blood or that of another human or animal,' and elsewhere I have argued that those who take such a stand are not without any biblical basis. However, such a position cannot be *proven* since what is said in the Bible is limited to the eating and drinking of blood, the only two known forms of taking blood into one's body in the ancient world. Additionally, there were not any proven or otherwise reliable medical means by which a person could, in a religious or non-religious context, believe that eating or drinking another's blood would give them any real extension to his or her life. Finally, when you consider the basis upon which certain fractions are accepted whereas the four "major" components are ruled out, it becomes even more difficult for the individual Witness to decide what is soundly based on God's Word. ... Christians are more than willing to live and die in obedience to God, but no one should be pressured into

risking his or her life for something that lacks explicit biblical support.⁵⁷

What I recognized in researching *Three Dissertations* was the other side of the same coin I had been looking at when I wrote the Second Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*. The "coin" is (in this case) the Bible, specifically the Decree to "abstain ... from blood." The other side of this "coin" is how one understands the prohibited *use*. Since the Watchtower Society permits withdrawing, storing, testing, and even fractionating of a person's blood, the Society also does *not* "abstain ... from [all uses of] blood." But what is/are the prohibited use(s) of blood according to the Apostolic Decree, as represented by the NT book of Acts?

First, consider how the Apostolic Decree similarly teaches us to "abstain [or 'keep abstaining'] from ... things strangled." As with "blood," there is no use verb to tell us what *not* to do with "things strangled." But I do not know anyone who would cite this as a basis for prohibiting the use "things strangled" for clothing or for tools. Rather, the context shows us that the prohibition should be associated with what is "read aloud in the synagogues on every sabbath" from "Moses."—Acts 15:21.

In the law of Moses "things strangled" can be further discerned from what is said in Leviticus 17:13, "As for any man of the sons of Israel or some alien resident who is residing as an alien in your midst who in hunting catches a wild beast or a fowl that may be eaten, he must in that case pour its blood out and cover it with dust." In other words, as is also noted in the NWT Reference Bible (1984) footnote to Acts 15:20, "things strangled" are animals "killed without draining [their] blood."

Similarly, then, we should use the law of Moses and other historical information from the Bible when evaluating what use(s) of "blood" are prohibited by what is recorded in Acts 15:20, 29, and 21:25. Like "things strangled," the noun "blood" requires either an explicit or an implied "use" verb to understand the prohibition, clearly. If the prohibited use is implied, then it can be discerned through the context in which the noun is used. In this case, the OT prohibits the "eating" of "blood" either alone

⁵⁷ *Three Dissertations*, pages 193, 194-195, 196.

or with “flesh,” *as food* (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:11-13; but compare Deuteronomy 14:21; see also Mark 7:19). But without such contextual associations clear in mind neither “blood” nor “things strangled” (both nouns) contain an inherent verbal idea, such as “eating.” By contrast, a verbal idea *is* present in the noun “fornication” (also prohibited by the Decree), namely, sex outside of marriage. So there is no further need to isolate a “use” that is prohibited by “abstain ... from fornication.”

The same is not true for the items prohibited by the Decree, namely, “things polluted by idols,” “things strangled,” and “blood.” For these, the context associates prohibited uses with the law of “Moses.” If we do the same thing, it is easier to see what uses of blood are likely prohibited by the Apostolic Decree in Acts, since the prohibited uses are associated with what was “read aloud in the synagogues on every sabbath” from “Moses” (Acts 15:21). This is how, as a Christian Witness of the biblical God Jah, I view the teaching of the Apostolic Decree, that is, by reviewing the best available reasons informing the same subject.

Today, however, the laws of “Moses” and other OT prohibitions concerning the eating of blood are not regularly “read aloud.” Therefore, as a Christian Witness of Jah I also believe for good reasons that any such eating, even eating of blood, is between each person and Jah God (Romans 14:4-8, 12). Indeed, Jesus himself taught us that God may choose to accept some who eat what Jah otherwise told his people not to eat, for even David ate “was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him,” and yet Jah preferred “mercy” rather than “sacrifice” (Matthew 12:1-7). So, too, should his Witnesses.

Christians come together to help each other and to praise Jah by looking to Jesus for how to live. We do not make it our business to pursue the medical, health, or dietary needs and interests of others (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:11). For Christian Witnesses of Jah and others who are moving on from association with the Watchtower Society because of its unbiblical traditions, the less we concern ourselves with what others do outside of praising Jah and treating others as we would ourselves, the more likely it is that we, too, will not be condemned.—Matthew 7:1; 23:34-40; James 2:13.

Personal Interests

We all have interests or even habits which we may enjoy alone, with our family, or with close friends. Some interests or habits are more generally appealing in different areas, such as reading, exercising, going to the beach, snowboarding, surfing, and other forms of recreation, study, enjoyment, or training. Other habits or interests may include listening to music, collecting various items, smoking, shopping for clothes, or relaxing with a glass of wine or eating certain kinds of foods, whether healthy or unhealthy (compare Romans 14:2-9 [quoted in part on page 593]). We all have personal interests which at times can be difficult for us to manage, particularly as we attempt to live as Christians in what is often a difficult world.

As I will explain more fully in the next chapter, Christian Witnesses of Jah are Jehovah's Witnesses who reject humankind's attempts to control others by means of traditions which invalidate what we have good reasons to believe and to practice. The primary source of our beliefs and of the good reasons supporting them is the eternal, intelligent life who gave life to life, whom we identify as the biblical God "Jah" (Psalm 113:1-3; 135:1, 3). Christian Witnesses of Jah are not defined by our belonging to any group or organization, but by what we do, "individually" and in association with others, whether we are "two or three" or more (Matthew 18:20). It is *this* coming together in Jesus' name along with our individual witness to Jesus and to the biblical God Jah which makes one a "Christian," not whether we all have the same interests or habits.—John 8:26-27, 54-55; Acts 11:26.

Like Jesus of Nazareth, Christians should teach and practice what we have good reasons to believe and we should do all we can to keep our personal habits from taking away from our ability to effectively bear witness to what can be shown to be true for good reasons (John 3:11; 7:16-18). At the same time, when people with like faith and beliefs get to know each other our personal interests or habits *can* become a distraction. Further, as many of us who have previously (or currently) belonged to a rigidly structured organization or group can bear witness, too much familiarity with others can dilute our focus on those to

whom we are spiritually committed. Further, if we become too familiar with each other outside of our shared Christian objectives then it is more likely we will develop a judgmental attitude, which could be corrosive to our faith and to our relationships with others.

As a Christian Witness of Jah I do not want to do anything which might point any one of us back to what we have left behind, namely, to traditions of men which are not based on good reasons. The best way I believe I can do this is by keeping what brings us together *to a minimum*, such as praising Jah and giving honor to Jesus by helping the poor and the lowly in his name, as he did in his Father's name (Luke 4:18-21; 10:21; John 8:28, 54), as well as other, similar activities which involve bearing witness to Jah and to Jesus.

Beyond these things, I do not want to be responsible for adding any further burden to any Christian man or woman, or child, son or daughter, mother or sister, father or brother, for fear that I, too, might become the very thing, the very type of person or organization, which I believe many of us so strongly now desire to avoid associating with Christianity.

To help reach this goal, I will make this the shortest section of this chapter, indeed, one of the shortest in this book, for the more I say about the personal interests of others the more I will likely be saying about myself or about my interests or habits (compare Luke 6:37-38). Thus, rather than do that I will instead leave the final words of this section to another, for what he teaches here sums up the Christian perspective where it concerns personal interests in this world (with my underlining):

Romans 14:1, 4-10, 12-17, 19, 22; 15:7 (NRSV)

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ... Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those

who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ... So then, each of us will be accountable to God. Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ... Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. ... The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve. ... Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Chapter Summary

As Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Witnesses of Jah need to do a better job of answering questions relating to abortion, sex, sexual orientation, and where it concerns uses of blood. That is, we must do a better job than those Jehovah's Witnesses who follow the Watchtower Society have done. It is hoped that this book, and in particular this chapter, will contribute meaningfully to that end. At the same time, when it comes to our personal interests or habits, I hope that by *not* discussing them beyond what I have done will empower others to be responsible for their interests and habits, knowing that we will all stand "individually" in judgment "according to [our] deeds."—Revelation 2:23.

When it comes to uses of blood today, as one of Jehovah's Witnesses I reject the Watchtower Society's false equation of using blood *as blood* with eating blood *as food*. I also reject, for the good reasons provided in this chapter, the Society's teaching that the four primary components of blood must also be rejected as "blood." In the Bible, we learn that Jah God loves life and that he did not create us to die (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:11; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54-55; Revelation 21:4). Yet, in this world there are times when a woman has to decide, hopefully based on the best available reasons, what to do if there are reasons for considering an abortion. Christians do not accept abortion as a form of birth control, because that is not the evident intent behind human design and reproduction, and it also contradicts Jah's desire for humans to "fill the earth" (Genesis 1:26). However, Christian Witnesses of Jah also try to give each person the benefit of the doubt and to avoid becoming causes for stumbling others ourselves, if at all possible.—Luke 17:1-4.

While homosexuality does not itself lead to the reproduction of human life, it may and for many it does involve physical pleasure and a stable relationship with strong emotion and love. By contrast, heterosexual relationships can produce human life and if they are kept together by doing good to each other and by living according to the one who made us in his image, then heterosexual relationships are more in accordance with male and female anatomical and physiological differences. This indicates clearly that male and female humans were *made* to have sex with each other, while this does not appear to be the case with same-sex relationships.

Still, some males may be attracted to other males and some females may be attracted to other females, and if this is the case then living as a Christian will likely be a much greater challenge for homosexuals than for many heterosexuals, at least in this respect. Therefore, homosexual Christians should be given love and support because they, too, are fighting "against the flesh," and so they may not be as able to openly express love and affection as are many heterosexual Christians (Romans 7:21-8:1). This, again, shows why we must avoid judging each other, for only those able to judge the "secret things of mankind" can fully understand and accept, or reject, any of us.—Romans 2:16.

It is similar with sex. The Bible does not tell us every way Christian husbands and wives can be with each other, sexually. But as Christians there are things we can consider as we decide how best to have sex. We can start by accepting and using our human body's design in different ways during foreplay and sexual intercourse, that is, to give pleasure to each other while at the same time showing respect and honor for the one who made us so we could have sex in the first place.

Even though we have the 'knowledge of good and bad' (Genesis 3:6-7; compare Isaiah 7:15-16), we do not *always* agree (see 1 Corinthians 7:36-38; Romans 14:1-12). To the extent that we can agree, let us come together to praise Jah! To the extent that we do not agree, or to the extent that we do not share similar interests or habits, let us put these aside so that, no matter what else it is which Jah permits us to do in this world, may "*every* breathing thing" praise Jah!—Psalm 150:6; Revelation 4:11; 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

10

Jehovah's Witnesses Christian Witnesses of Jah

Those who speak and who act with the intent to deceive or to take advantage of others do so in ways which are not always easy to notice. That is why it is called “deception,” that is, where someone or something is knowingly not who or what he, she, or it claims to be. Rather, the deceiver puts on a front or cover to hide behind. That is why you never know with a deceiver, and there is not even a good reason to consider for what a deceiver says or does, proven by this fact: *no one who deceives wants to be deceived*. So there is an evident inconsistency which can be isolated and criticized each time a true deception is involved.

Christianity avoids this criticism by *using our own treatment and judgment of others to determine how we are then also to be treated and judged* (Matthew 7:1, 12). Here, too, are the ways of Jah and Jesus set clearly against the ways of those who deceive. The primary difference is while one side believes the treatment and the judgment should be fair (which fairness can be checked by what we would accept or receive ourselves), the other side believes it is acceptable to take advantage of others for selfish gain though, again, members of this side would not accept such treatment for themselves.

In spite of the danger which deception and lies pose to each of us, there is also the human tendency to come together and to associate, and to work with others in groups (compare Genesis 11:1, 4). This can be for good, so long as the goals of the group are clearly defined and, for Christianity, based solely on the best available reasons. Yet, large groups and associations of people often become breeding grounds for humans to take advantage of

others. Indeed, the larger the group the easier it is for “the wicked one” to hide and to ‘sow’ his deception.—Matthew 13:38-39.

Yet, according to the Bible whether we are with *one* other person or with millions of others, we will be judged by what we do *individually* (see Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; Revelation 2:23; 20:13). That is why it is written the Messiah from Jah “will not judge by any mere appearance to his eyes, nor reprove simply according to the thing heard by his ears,” but “with righteousness he must judge the lowly ones, and with uprightness he must give reproof in behalf of the meek ones of the earth.”—Isaiah 11:3-5.

When we group individuals together to a point where our evaluation becomes less individualistic and more group-identity-oriented, if such groupings wrongly represent the interests and intentions of even a single person then that descriptive grouping is in need of further differentiation within the defined group. Or the grouping needs to be avoided or rejected completely, because it is “misleading.”—Compare 2 Timothy 3:13; Revelation 12:9.

This happens often in discussions about race or color today, for example, where some use fallacious and misleading descriptions and groupings such as “*white* people” or “*black* people.” Instead, what people who speak on issues of race or color should say (if they wanted to be accurate, respectful, and constructive) is ‘*some* persons who are white’ or ‘*some* persons who are black’ do or say certain things. But your or my color or race does not speak for our actions or for who we are as persons in God’s sight.

Therefore, the color given to our skin should not define who we are as individuals, since “God does not go by a man’s outward appearance” (Galatians 2:6). Indeed, “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:6-11). This further highlights the significance of what I consider the best reason for how we should live and for how we should treat others, that is, by ‘treating others as we would want to be treated ourselves,’ though without letting anyone take advantage of us.—Matthew 7:6; compare Matthew 25:1-12.

As one of Jehovah’s Witnesses I try to identify the beliefs and practices supported by the best available evidence, rather than promote beliefs I have learned to be mere tradition kept in

place for no good reasons. I also want to do as much good as possible, since there is good reason to believe that what we do comes back to us in a meaningfully corresponding way.

This is true not only where it concerns our judgment by God “individually” (as noted earlier), but also now, today, for if we “practice giving” then “people will give” to us. Indeed, “they will pour into your laps a fine measure, pressed down, shaken together and overflowing” (Luke 6:38). This Christian principle of sending forth what you want to come back upon you is also driven home by Jesus in the following illustration:

Matthew 18:23-35 NAB

[T]he kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’ Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.

We can be this way, the way that is evidently good and right in the above illustration, that is, when seen as it is here against what is clearly wrong. We can tell this difference and validate it by considering ourselves in each role, and *then* we know how we

would want to be treated ourselves. *That* is a good reason for why we should then “be doing the same” (Luke 10:37). We should help the poor because if we were poor we would want help, too. We can comfort others when they are in need or depressed, as we also would want comfort in similar circumstances.

We should give when we are able, and if we think we are not perhaps we should still try. For a certainty, if we were in need, we would want someone to give to us from what is theirs to give, if possible, according to what is our genuine need (Ephesians 4:28; 1 John 3:17-18; compare 1 Corinthians 12:19-27). We can do all these and so many other *good* things, for we were designed to do them and to enjoy doing them!—Psalm 139:14.

Jah can be seen in each one of us, and in the world and in all things, for Jah “made the world and all the things in it, being, as this One is, Lord of heaven and earth ... because he himself gives to all [persons] life and breath and all things.” Jah “made out of one [man] every nation of men, to dwell upon the entire surface of the earth, and he decreed the appointed times and the set limits [for our] dwelling ... For by him we have life and move and exist.”—Acts 17:24-26, 28; compare Revelation 4:11.

I believe what is said in these texts from the NT, not simply because the Bible says it and because I assume the Bible is true. There are several lines of credible evidence and reasoning which direct me to the Bible and to what it teaches about Jah and about Jesus, and so also explain why I am a Christian Witness of Jah. These reasons include:

1. The best available evidence demonstrates life can only come from existing life, or as a result of something or someone already alive.
2. Since life does exist all around us, life must also be eternal, that is, for life to have existed at all and for it to then give life to other life.
3. The best available evidence indicates that this eternal life who gave life to life is also intelligent rather than a random, *unintelligent*, or accidental Life Giver.¹

¹ See also my more recent articles, “Advanced ‘Earth Conditions’: Corrections to Miller’s 1953 Hypothesis and Its Likely Indications,” *Elihu Online Papers 1* (July 4, 2010 [rev. January 10, 2011]); “The Origin of Life Is Life (or Something or Someone

4. This eternal, intelligent Life Giver actively develops existing life, as well as countless different forms of life over vast periods of time, but whose bones in the earth give witness to their prehistoric life, life which must also have come from the eternal, intelligent Life Giver.—Compare 1 Corinthians 8:6; 11:12.
5. In association with the best available reasons, including reasons informing my beliefs for 1. through 4. above, I believe part of this intelligent Life Giver's history with humankind is credibly represented in the pages of the books of the Bible. I also believe this is true concerning the history and the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.
6. As Chapter 1 shows, the least disputable form of the Life Giver's name according to the Bible is "Jah," and it is *this* name whom all living creatures will praise.—Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, and 6.²
7. The Bible also teaches us about Jah's will for mankind, why Jah sent forth Jesus of Nazareth, and why those who follow him are called "Christians" (Acts 11:26; 1 John 4:14; Revelation 21:1-5). These ones are to treat others the way Jesus of Nazareth lived and also how we would want others to treat us (Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). Related to all this, because Jesus came and lived only according to Jah's will, all the way to his death, the Son's name will also be lifted up and honored "to the glory of God the Father."—John 8:28; Philippians 2:5-11.³

Therefore, in association with the above and for other good reasons presented in this book, I consider myself a Christian Witness of Jah or one of Jehovah's Witnesses who rejects what is not based on the best available evidence. I do not want anything more to do with those who try to 'govern,' control, or influence

Already Alive)," *Watching the Ministry* (January 13, 2010); "The Intelligence in Life: Intent and 'Time,'" *Watching the Ministry* (February 8, 2010); "Intentional Intelligence in Non-Human Life: The Division of Human Language," *Watching the Ministry* (April 5, 2010), available through <http://www.elihubooks.com>.

² See also my article, "'Christian' Witnesses of Jah, Jaho(h)-ah God," *Watching the Ministry* (April 2, 2011).

³ See my more recent article, "Three Things," *Watching the Ministry* (June 7, 2011).

the thoughts of others,⁴ or who reject biblical beliefs based on good reasons in favor of what can reasonably be shown to be nothing but human-inspired tradition. I believe the best available reasons point to the Bible and to the intelligence in our design as sources of information about the eternal Life Giver and God, Jah.

If Jah is really the eternal life who gave life to all other life, and the best available reasons motivate me to believe this is true, then others who believe the same way can talk about Jah in ways others will understand. If our reasons are good, then others will see this, and then in Jah's image they will believe and become happy!—Acts 18:28; 20:20-21; 9:22; Romans 1:11-12; 10:9-10; James 1:12.

⁴ In addition to what is written in *The Watchtower* about 'not harboring private ideas when it comes to Bible understanding,' and in addition to demanding "complete confidence in the truth as it is revealed by Jehovah God through his Son, Jesus Christ, and the faithful and discreet slave" ("Make Your Advancement Manifest," August 1, 2001, page 14, par. 8), the Watchtower Society has also discouraged and expressed written disapproval of independent study groups and study activities which are not under the Society's "oversight." After presenting the question, "Does 'the faithful and discreet slave' endorse independent groups of Witnesses who meet together to engage in Scriptural research or debate?—Matt. 24:45, 47," in the September, 2007, English edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, note part of the Watchtower Society's response on page 3 (underlining added):

No, it does not. And yet, in various parts of the world, a few associates of our organization have formed groups to do independent research on Bible-related subjects. Some have pursued an independent group study of Biblical Hebrew and Greek so as to analyze the accuracy of the New World Translation. Others explore scientific subjects related to the Bible. They have created Web sites and chat rooms for the purpose of exchanging and debating their views. They have also held conferences and produced publications to present their findings and to supplement what is provided at our Christian meetings and through our literature. Throughout the earth, Jehovah's people are receiving ample spiritual instruction and encouragement at congregation meetings, assemblies, and conventions, as well as through the publications of Jehovah's organization. Under the guidance of his holy spirit and on the basis of his Word of truth, Jehovah provides what is needed so that all of God's people may be "fitly united in the same mind and in the same line of thought" and remain stabilized in the faith" (1 Cor. 1:10; Col. 2:6, 7) Surely we are grateful for Jehovah's spiritual provisions in these last days. Thus, "the faithful and discreet slave" does not endorse any literature, meetings, or Web sites that are not produced or organized under its oversight.—Matt. 24:45-47.

Yet, 'taking it upon themselves' to check the accuracy of what Paul taught about the Christ is precisely what constituted the ancient Bereans as "more noble-minded" than others (Acts 17:10-11; compare Rev 2:2). The Bereans "carefully" examined the evidence together and as a result "many of them became believers," as did quite a few of "the reputable Greek women and of the men" (Acts 17:12). By contrast, as noted above, the Watchtower Society does not "endorse" such group examination of the scriptures apart from "any literature, meetings, or Web sites" not "under its oversight."

Jehovah's Witnesses are those who bear witness to the God of the Bible, but apart from the traditions of men (Isaiah 29:13; 43:10, 12). Being Jah's or Jesus' Witness does not depend on becoming a member in a group of *many*, for whether there are "two or three" (Matthew 18:20) or many more *that* is how many are our spiritual family and "congregation." After sufficiently addressing the needs of those who depend most directly upon us (1 Timothy 3:5), if Jah wills it we can reach out to our neighbors first and then elsewhere to as many as are willing to learn about Jah and about Jesus, and about what it means to live and to act according to good reasons.

In the Bible we learn at some point each one of us obtains "the knowledge of good and bad" (Genesis 2:17; 3:6), as well as the knowledge of "how to reject the bad and *choose the good*" (Isaiah 7:15, emphasis added). But there are some today who, as in times past, "are saying that good is bad and bad is good, those who are putting darkness for light and light for darkness, those who are putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20). Since doing what is good is fundamental to being a Christian, if *what is good* is unclear or distorted then Christians must rise up and *define* what is good, and *defend* what is good, or how will we "keep doing good"?—Romans 13:3.

As noted earlier, one of the most important reasons Christians have for how we treat others is "the kingly law according to the scripture," namely, "You must love your neighbor as yourself" (James 2:8). If you want what is good, then *ask* for what is good. For as Jesus taught, "[W]hich father is there" who "if his son asks for a fish, will perhaps hand him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he also asks for an egg, will hand him a scorpion?" Indeed, if we though "wicked" can "give good gifts to [our] children, how much more so will" Jah give good things and "holy spirit to those asking him!"—Luke 11:11-13; compare Luke 18:1-8.

"Learn to do good; search for justice; set right the oppressor; render judgment for the fatherless boy; plead the cause of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17, emphasis added). Then Jah will let us start or continue in the works for which we were made, namely, "*good works*" (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added). "Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely if anyone has a cause for complaint against another. . . . let the peace of the Christ

control in your hearts ... And show yourselves thankful. ... Keep on teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, praises to God, spiritual songs with graciousness, singing” to Jah God and in praise of his Son (Colossians 3:13-16; James 5:13; Revelation 5:9-14). But “*whatever it is that you do* in word or in work, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God the Father through him.”—Colossians 3:17, emphasis added.

While this book has helped me to continue my defense of the good reasons for many of the beliefs held by those who consider themselves Jehovah's Witnesses, I hope it has also helped those who may have left off from bearing witness to Jah or to Jesus because of their experiences with the Watchtower Society. If you are like me in these ways, then such an experience could not be more profound in its awakening. Unfortunately, such growth can also include a period of darkness, but one in which you can find yourself, or where Jah and Jesus will find you, and then they will make you “strong.”—1 Peter 5:10; Revelation 3:2, 11, 20-22.

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